but ashes and dust

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but ashes and dust

by Breakmybones (CarterReid)

Summary

If there was anything that Will truly hated in the world, it was that everyone could see the strangeness of his soul as it walked beside him. Anonymity wasn't a privilege for someone like him, and at thirty-two, Will was long since used to the sideways glances and judgement that came with having Einar for a Daemon.

Until him, of course.

Notes

So I'm super excited for this AU. I've been considering it for a while, but never narrowed down a storyline enough to feel confident in posting, so hopefully you guys like.
I'll update as quickly as I can but this may take a little longer than usual :)
Hope you are all lovely and well,
Stay sane lovely people
-R.

prologue

Chapter Notes

hey everyone, as per usual, rights to the right people, of course.
hope you like - if not then feel free to shout at me and point me in the right direction!
love you all,
enjoy.
-R.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

At thirty-two, Will was long since used to the sideways glances and judgement that came with having an unusual Daemon.

In fact, he expected it.

Usually, those who *didn't* react poorly to Einar were the killers he hunted or, on one occasion, a particularly mean-spirited old woman in the mall who had thrown even nastier spirited words at two boys holding hands and swapping kisses while their butterfly Daemons fluttered around them. Needless to say, Will didn't hold out much hope for people who treated his Daemon well. The best people were, incredibly, those who blanked Einar. Those who saw, acknowledged their own discomfort, but were too kind, or polite, to do or say anything, and so deliberately (and obviously) avoided looking at him. Not that Einar cared, of course. His Daemon was more anti-social than he was, more than content to slip through life invisibly and avoiding the usual social constructions and expectations that Will still had to abide by. They'd argued about it of course, and how Einar might make life easier for Will, but the Daemon only scowled, disappearing from sight and leaving Will feeling very much like the arsehole in the situation.

All in all, the situation with his Daemon was unusual. But that's what happened when, at thirty-two, your Daemon still hadn't settled.

The men in white-coats called in 'Restless Soul Syndrome'. To Will that sounded like ridiculously politically correct code for: *put them in an asylum,* ***now,*** especially given the monumentally negative attention given to it. Even the people *in the profession* were never sure whether they were enthralled with curiosity or horrified at the implication of an old soul still unfixed in the world, and so not many people with RSS actually came forward. In fact, the last three on the news had been 'discovered' by parents or friends when, in the days after their eighteenth birthday, their Daemon was still flitting between forms and showed no signs of stopping.

Will, remarkably, had been one of the lucky ones, reaching almost twenty-seven before someone found out that Einar still changed forms. Being orphaned at seventeen meant that he

wasn't subject to the concerns or intrusions of a parent and he'd been clever enough to avoid foster-care in the bowels of Louisiana until he was of legal age, so again, guardians weren't a problem. Being anti-social, or *weird*, or *inflicted with empathy*, or whatever they called it, meant that there were barely friends to look closely enough - and the one that might have moved away six months before his father passed to be closer to family in New England. So while on his eighteenth birthday he was greeted with an Einar perched on his wardrobe in one of his more favoured forms, a black barn owl, and he'd assumed what all others do, when halfway through his cereal, Einar swooped down, wings spread, and shifted mid flight into a black wolf, Will realised that while he'd be able to keep them both out of the public eye for the most part, his life was never going to be the same. That was after, of course, he choked on his milk, swore, froze and barely mustered the brain power to stop the Daemon eating the remains of his food.

The five solitary years studying part time for his degree sandwiched between fixing boat motors and fishing were good. He had become good at predicting the shifts between Einar's four forms. Only three he wore in public, the forth only appearing in solitude and away from the outside world. Will was almost certain that it was *that* form that was his true, *final* state, although the near mute Daemon never agreed or disagreed with his assumptions. So Will was just as in the dark. But he knew that certain days meant that Einar preferred certain forms: windy or snowy? - it was better to be a wolf. Glorious blue skies? - only a owl would do. Honestly, even with his Daemon being unpredictable, the slight buzz underneath his skin that would build quickly over the course of a couple of minutes was practically a neon sign that Einar was going to slip into a different state. Although even with that, it wasn't always perfect.

It was his third year on the force that everything fell apart.

Will quickly discovered that Einar's rarest form, one that appeared perhaps once every couple of months, began to appear much more often when he joined the New Orleans Police Department. It took him an embarrassingly long time to correlate his Daemon's state with him diving into the headspaces that belonged to serial killers, rapists and other vile members of the human race. It transpired that while his empathy let his swim in the thoughts of monsters, each dip poisoned a part of him more and more. And while he burst quickly through the ranks, gaining a reputation as a voodoo priest able to see inside souls amongst the most suspicious (and the worst of the bullies), and also one of the most impressive arrest records in the city, he always felt dirty and fearful when seeing Einar shift into the inland Taipan snake that would drape himself around Will's neck, or curl up beneath his desk lamp. It had led to a lot of hard work done at odd hours - and while his superiors thought it was part of his 'gift' and that his process would be better not disturbed, it was simply because there was no way to explain the appearance of a snake at his desk when an Owl had sat there only moments before. In the end it wasn't the snake that gave him away. A knife to the shoulder and he and Einar were screaming in pain and before the eyes of his attacker and an equally injured fellow officer, his Daemon shifted into a wolf and promptly tore the offender's Daemon to pieces. The drug runner wasn't doing anything then, not with the intestines of his soul streaked across the alley floor.

And so began the looks, weighted, loaded, filled with fear and worry and **horror** at a man unhinged and untethered in the world. Many said it was shock, but most whispered things

like they already knew, or had suspected, and vicious rumours began, no doubt started by those who he had surpassed in his quick scrambling up the ranks. The curses and the looks lived, not in shadows, but in light, striding through his spaces as though they had every right to be there. As though the opinion others had of him should overwhelm his senses - like it was worth more than the opinion he had of himself.

He hated it.

But still the looks persisted.

And they followed him.

They followed him North, to Virginia, to the halls of the FBI, to a dingy classroom with too hard seats and a projector that worked only after you hit it three times. They followed him to Jack Crawford's office and a pin board filled with girls that had gone before their time. To crime scenes with torn up bodies lying prone and the butchered remains of Daemons that had been cut into strips with something jagged. They took him to a dark prison filled with howling inmates and Daemons gone feral - to a man who claimed he was something he was not, because there wasn't any chance that the Ripper had an otter as a Daemon. Fierce or not, that creature had something *dangerous* for his soul. They took him West too, to middle America and other departments whom Jack owed a favour to and he was looked at like a party favour, whored out to solve a case because they were stuck and Jack wanted to settled a debt. Einar had spent the whole time as a wolf, snapping not once, not twice, but *three* times at Aurick, Jack's Daemon who, despite having settled as a Rhodesian Ridgeback, all but whined when near Einar, regardless of form. It showed Will that even Jack, with all his bravado and the notable time he actually met Einar's cool gaze, was deeply spooked at it all. But still he pushed, sending Will out until there were almost *always* eyes on him; and Einar, mute as far as the world knew, waited until they were both alone before murmuring: "You'd have thought people hadn't seen a Daemon before," with the level of disgust that Will himself felt. Both, however, were too frightened to voice the truth: that the truth was now another reason for the world to reject them. After all, it took Freddie Lounds and her magpie Portia all of ten minutes to suss out that there was something *off* about him. It took them ten hours to uncover the whole truth - and a photo of every public form Einar took. Will, along with Einar as a wolf, an owl and a snake, were plastered on the Tattler the next day with a glaring headline about how insane men were being used to catch insane men. He tried to brush off the words but they cut deeper than he wanted them too.

"I can bite her, if you want," Einar had offered, scales glinting in the dawn light as he looped his way around Will's arm and up to his face. "She'd die quickly." Will hadn't dignified that with a response, instead letting his fingers gently caress his Daemon's head and sip at the whisky shining in the glass in his free hand. The stray dogs he'd collected in the years since Louisiana had taken advantage of the lull in their conversation to inch forward, tightening the pile around him, eager for food or a walk, he wasn't sure, but they were hesitant to ask. While they adored Einar, they were fearful when he had scales and a forked tongue. In the end, his Daemon had shifted and they spent the next hour and a half walking the property until a phone call brought his isolated serenity crashing down.

Because that was what he did. He dodged the common man, ignored the ramblings of Lounds in her terrible rag of a newspaper and looked at bodies until his Daemon turned scaly and his mind filled with blood.

But then blood wan't the only thing filling his mind. Because while the looks followed him to an office, Einar padding beside him as a wolf, with Jack and Aurick in tow, they stopped at the door, instead vanishing into oblivion. Because he couldn't sense them.

"Hello," was the greeting, "may I help you?" Polite, to the point. There was a soft, inquisitive huff of noise from inside - the Daemon no doubt - and then Jack was speaking...

"Ah yes, *Dr Lecter*? I'm Jack Crawford. We spoke on the phone? We're here about a case."

Chapter End Notes

sorry for an grammar/spelling etc., i'll catch as many as i can but lol, I'm still pretty shit at editing haha
-R.

Perkūnas

Chapter Notes

> Hey you guys! You've all been super duper positive about this so thank you very muchly. I'm going to take a run at this (I hope you guys like) but feel free to shout out any critiques or anything (I'd love to hear you thoughts!)
>
> Rights where they go, of course,
>
> And hope everyone's having a thankful, and joyful, Thanksgiving!
> Love to you all,
> -R.

There was something truly extraordinary about Hannibal Lecter, Will thought.

Visually, he was stunning. Brown hair, slicked to one side but still so incredibly soft looking. Deep, dark maroon pools for eyes that held a lot more than the Doctor was willing to share dragged Will further and further into a mind that felt like soft, black silk on the ragged edges of his mind. It was soothing, intoxicating even, and Will knew that Hannibal's mind was a dangerous snare for him. The foreigner's face was symmetrical, more so than the profiler had ever seen before, but it was sharp and angular, and he had to bit the inside of his cheek to stop himself from reaching out to run the tips of his fingers down the lines of the Doctor's features. He was wearing a charcoal grey suit, with an overlaying crimson, plaid pattern, with an accompanying vest, pale white-blue shirt and a silver and dark red flower tie. It was fancy and upper class, more suited to men who took tea in the parlour, balked at the notion of being held accountable and doled out misogyny, racism and homophobia between bites of their breakfast, than a man of Hannibal's appearance. (After all, while he no doubt held the interests of opera and art common to such a group, there were obvious markers that distinguished him and one was the rolling muscles packed underneath the fabric that the suit did little to hide.) The man before him, while not flaunting his strength, wasn't ashamed to frame it with expensive material. He'd done so well in fact that Will struggled to look elsewhere, eyes raking over Hannibal's form as though determined to map every inch of him. And every inch told him the same thing: here was a man who knew how to handle himself, should the need arise. And suddenly Will was burning with need to see his Daemon. The stereotype that most individuals in caring, hands-on professions: psychiatrists, counsellors, doctors and nurses (although often not surgeons), had gentle, soothing Daemons was actually rather accurate. Their souls were often an avid reflection of their desire to *help*, but Will couldn't imagine a koala, or an elephant, or a rabbit, or a sheep, or even a capybara as the form Hannibal's soul took. Nothing less than a Daemon filled with grace and power would do a man like Dr Lecter justice, Will thought, mind slipping further and further as his empathy swaddled him in Hannibal's perspective. No, a man who wrapped himself in muscle and

waded through the perversions and oddities of man was someone at the top of his food-chain. *Prey* was the last word he'd associate with the Doctor.

Einar, it seemed, was just as curious. He'd been slowly padding closer towards the man with narrowed eyes as Will had spent the time staring. His snout was raised a little, clearly trying to suss something out - although the profiler wasn't sure *what* - and his tail was moving just enough to show interest. For a moment Will thought he might *touch* Hannibal the closer he got, but he paused beside Aurick instead, head tilted fractionally to the side. For Will though, Einar was practically painting a glaring neon sign of caution, interest and uncertainty: a mix Will wasn't one hundred percent sure how to deal with. Aurick had bared his teeth a little as the wolf stopped and although Jack spared him no attention, a frown deepened Hannibal's features at the action. Wolf Daemon's weren't particularly common, or popular, amongst the public, with words like *rabid*, *unrefined* and *feral* often floating around in discussions about that particular soul form, but the response was **more** than just prejudice and the psychiatrist could tell. And he was interested. Most people would be - it was rare that a Daemon inspired such a reaction, especially unprovoked and with their humans seemingly at ease with one another.

Will's heart sank, because once more he was being *looked* at, and Hannibal didn't even know the true extent of Einar's difference.

"Of course Agent Crawford," Hannibal said distractedly, half of his attention now pinned to the wolf staring him down. "Please, come on in." He stood aside gracefully and Will practically groaned as Einar took that as an opportunity to bound into the room. Jack, Aurick and Will were close behind, the latter offering a half nod and a grimace in greeting to the Doctor, who returned the greeting politely but couldn't shake the faint glimmer of curiosity that sat in his gaze. Surprisingly though the profiler found he didn't mind Lecter looking nearly as much as he did others. *Curious,* he thought as he stepped further into the room, *perhaps this might not be so bad*.

As it happened, he should have stayed outside.

The Daemon lay sunning himself in the afternoon rays was, just as Will expected, both incredibly beautiful, but incredibly dangerous. A true predator from every angle. With sleek black fur, bright green eyes and miles of rippling muscle, the creature was intimidating in size, power and beauty. Hannibal's Daemon was a **jaguar**.

Any other Daemons nearby would no doubt naturally defer to the one already present in the room, or at least avoid him, given the presence he seemed to exude. What was incredible though was that Einar did something he'd never done before, and that was actively engage with another Daemon. Rather than nod his head in acknowledgement, as all other Daemon's did, he had stalked over and rudely invaded the jaguar's space, head butting firmly against the other Daemon's. When only an affronted grunt came in reply, Einar had abandoned all traces of social ques and, if the sudden growling was any indication, stood on the jaguar's tail. A burst of speed and blur of movement saw both Daemon's on their feet, teeth bared, hackles raised and growls pouring from their mouths. Even as a large, alpha wolf, Einar looked remarkably out-matched by the side of the full-grown male jaguar.

"*Perkūnas*," Hannibal snapped, apparently alarmed by the sudden shift in tension. But he could only watch as his Daemon coiled his muscles tightly, shifted his weight from one paw to another, before lunging forward with a sort of gravelling hiss... only to tumble through the air, an adorably confused look on his face. Einar, expecting the leap, had shifted mid attack in a flurry of fur and feathers. He beat his wings several times before he hooted smugly and came to perch on Will's shoulder, looking down at Perkūnas with amusement.

There were a few moments of silence, most of which were the Doctor and his Daemon just staring at each other, startled, and then Will and Einar. Jack took the opportunity to intercede, ignoring the angry stance his Daemon had taken up against the owl (ironically the only one who had as both Hannibal and Perkūnas had decided confusion was the best approach).

"Apologies Dr Lecter," he began, glaring at Einar. The owl only puffed out his chest in reply and ruffled his feathers. "Einar is a *difficult* Daemon," he grimaced. "I hope you're still able to assist?" There was another pause before Hannibal *finally* tore his gaze from Will and nodded his head, hands smoothing out the non-existent creases in his suit.

"Of course Agent Crawford," he replied, accent like velvet. "There is no harm done. And please, call me Hannibal," he said before gesturing to his Daemon still staring curiously at the owl on Will's shoulder, "and this is Perkūnas."

"Pleasure," the jag purred, tail flicking from side to side. His voice was similar to Hannibal's but slightly higher, lighter almost. It was just as pleasant but, as with all Daemon's, lacked any accent.

Jack dipped his head, "Jack, please. This is Aurick," he introduced, letting the dog chime in with a gruff '*hello*', stance finally easing, before continuing, "and, uh, Will Graham and Einar," he added with a flapping hand over his shoulder. He paused, "Einar doesn't speak," he added when the pair turned once more to Will and his Daemon, clearly expecting some apology or, at least, a greeting.

"Huh," Perkūnas huffed, narrowing his eyes once more. He glanced to Hannibal and the man frowned before speaking rapidly in a language that Will didn't know. The Daemon swished his tail several more times before huffing again and slowly returning to his place at the window. He flopped down, letting the sun catch the faint rosettes on his body, appearing to be as relaxed, although the slight tensing in Hannibal's shoulders spoke volumes. Einar, unconcerned with the remaining animosity, took the movement as an invitation. He jumped, shifting once more, and his paws landed on the carpet with a soft thud.

"Coward," Will muttered, hands shoved deep in his pockets as the wolf lay down at his feet. Einar didn't reply and Will knew he wouldn't get an explanation about the Daemon's actions until they were alone, so he didn't even both to try, but the wolf did bare his teeth in a mockery of a smile and wag his tail a few times.

"Remarkable," the Doctor breathed, finally unable to keep his interest in check.

Both Will and Einar looked up at that, because *never,* in all their time, had that been a particular response. But they had been greeted positively... and a positive greeting meant killer. A glance down told him his Daemon had come to the same conclusion, but, a look in

his eye told the profiler that he knew *more*, or at least, Einar already had an idea about Hannibal's *proclivities*.

"The case, Dr Lecter," Jack jumped in, preemptively taking a seat and scowling at Will do to the same. He was clearly eager to move the conversation on - probably because he, like Will, had no idea how to respond to Hannibal's open awe and intrigue for Einar. "We were in need of new opinions, sir, as you know, and well Dr Bloom speaks very highly of you." He paused, handing over a file he'd been clutching tightly for the past few minutes. "This is the latest in a line of several murders, Dr. Lecter, and we were hoping you might have some ideas."

The maroon-eyed man took the file with a nod, perching on the edge of his desk and flicking it open. His gaze raked over the information and Will saw the murder of Sarah O'Dane and her Daemon Freya - a sparrow - behind his eyes. He watched as the killer opened up her chest while she lived, splayed open her ribs and laughed as she drowned in her own blood, although not before watching as his opened up her Daemon with a pair of scissors and a butcher's knife. The shock of watching that alone must have been more painful than anything the killer could have done. That didn't stop him from shoving the carcass of the deceased soul down Sarah's throat though, finding pleasure as she choked around the feathered remains of Freya and burned with the pain of losing both her soul and, slowly, her body. It had been a mindset that Will thoroughly, thoroughly hated and had fought Jack repeatedly about entering it. But he'd had to, and Einar had hissed his displeasure at every turn. But the killer was dangerous and, like clockwork, struck every three months. He had already killed thrice before Will was brought on the case, and twice more since then. Sarah had been six weeks ago and Jack wanted a win on this. Bringing in Bloom hadn't worked, so he was counting on Lecter to help steer Will's empathy in the right direction.

"This is a particularly troubled man, Agent Crawford," Hannibal murmured softly. Even Perkūnas was paying attention, eyes fixed on his human before shifting to Einar. His gaze was more weighted than Will would have liked. "Let's see if I cannot help you see his face?"

A shiver went down his spine and somehow, despite there being something extraordinary about Hannibal, Will couldn't help but feel that he'd just signed his own death warrant. He glanced over at Jack. The man seemed happy, even offering a smile. "That's fantastic," he enthused.

"Might I have a day or two to study the case? Then we could meet again and I might share my thoughts?" the Doctor asked.

"Of course," Jack replied, fishing out a card from his pocket. "Call, or come by Quantico," he said, "Dr Bloom will be there as well, of course." He paused, tone turning a touch sour. "Will too."

Will snorted at the comment, stomach feeling heavy as he felt even more unwelcome in the office than he already did. Einar bared his teeth, sensing his displeasure, but didn't act, instead his ears flattening towards his head, almost like he too was hurt. A movement in his peripheral drew Will's attention. Perkūnas had stood once more, slowly moving over towards them both. Hannibal had frowned at the comment but was once again speaking with Jack about what time was appropriate to meet and whether he might have access to the rest of the

case files, and so were, apparently, unaware of an impending Round 2. When Perkūnas stopped, however, hovering over Einar, the wolf stood sharply, butting heads again. After a few moments of hesitation, this time the jaguar replied, butting back before opening his mouth wide, almost yawning, and baring his teeth. Then he butted the side of Einar's head again. So Einar reached up and took Perkūnas' ear in his mouth, tugging gently as though trying to pull him to the ground.

Holy shit, Will thought, *he wants to play*. He paused, glancing up and **how-the-hell-had-Hannibal-not-noticed-this**, because they *both* wanted to play. And was that what Einar was trying to do earlier - play? Was he just so unused to contact, human and Daemon alike, that his offensive greeting was an attempt to initiate roughhousing?

Will felt dizzy. And not just because of this implications of that.

"Idiot," Will muttered to his Daemon, shaking his head as Einar stood on his hind legs and shoved at Perkūnas with a huff. The jaguar snorted once, allowing it, but the noise had dragged attention from the two still muttering to themselves. Hannibal looked a little pale at the sight of his Daemon letting a wolf butt him in the side before swiping with his paw good-naturedly in reply. "Okay," he murmured, looking down, "time to go Einar." The wolf growled a little before huffing heavily, shoving at Perkūnas once more and returning to Will's side.

"Right..." Jack breathed, eyes wide. "Uh, *thank you* Dr Lecter," he said, nodding, "I'll see you in a tomorrow afternoon." He turned to Will and jerked his head. The man rolled his eyes but followed, unable to stop a half-formed snort at the look on the psychiatrist's face.

The confused and rather startled look belonging to the foreigner had settled in the forefront of his mind and refused to leave it for the duration of the journey back to Wolf Trap and into the silence of his house. His house - a boat at sea amidst the fog - suddenly felt a lot more anchored. There was a lighthouse, now, and he knew that his Daemon had just started something that he might, inevitably, come to regret...

"You know," he began after he'd let out the dogs and poured himself a whisky, "you could of handled that better."

Einar huffed from his place beside the fire, barely glancing up. He had shifted again and his forth form was mocking Will from across the room. "Could *you* have?"

"I did," he replied, taking a sip.

"You knew as soon as you saw them, *both of them*, what they might be," he paused. "To us both, I mean."

Will grimaced a little, unwilling to yield or confess to the feelings he'd felt around the Doctor and his Soul. He knew, however, that attempting such deception was pointless - Einar *knew*. Einar *always* knew. "I also know that Hannibal Lecter has dark thoughts," the profiler eventually muttered, downing his drink in one movement and replenishing the glass in the next.

Einar hummed in agreement, seeming far too uninterested in that notion that Will might have liked. "I know," he replied, "and it's more than thoughts. I smelt the blood on him. On them both, actually." Will looked down at his Daemon sharply. Green eyes met blue. "It doesn't matter, Will."

"Of course it does," he snapped, trying to manufacture shock as well as anger, but somehow it just wouldn't come. They both had a way with the monsters and no amount of self-denial was going to change that fact. Still, he was frustrated as his Daemon's blatant display of intent towards the pair without consulting him first, or disclosing what he had known.

"No," Einar drawled lazily, ignoring the annoyance and flicking his tail from side to side where he lay. "They're more than just *compatible* with us. You know the best matches have similar Daemons," he huffed out a laugh. "And well *look at me*."

"You're a black *leopard*, Einar," Will shot back, slamming his glass down, something akin to panic bleeding into his veins, "not a jaguar."

Einar smirked, his face tilting to the side as he stretched out the miles of rolling muscle packed beneath his skin. Sometimes Will was amazed his Daemon hadn't permanently settled in the form. But maybe it had all just been a matter of time - and with the introduction of Hannibal and Perkūnas, maybe that time was *now*.

"Maybe," he conceded gently, barely hiding something wicked beneath his gaze, "but you know as well as I, Will, that most people are unable to tell the difference."

Portia

Chapter Notes

Thank you for your lovely comments, you are all too kind!

Onward we go, then.

Rights to those who deserve them, of course, especially our King Bryan Fuller and Legendary Thomas Harris.

Enjoy all,
-R.

"Perkūnas is outside," was the first thing Will heard when he woke. It was blurry though, like trying to listen through a fog, and for a moment, Will was certain he had misheard his Daemon who, still in his leopard form, had jumped up onto the bed and smacked his human's face with a paw.

"...wha?" the blue eyed man slurred, cracking open an eye, not bothering to express his displeasure at being woken verbally but instead scowling with the best of his ability.

"Perkūnas," Einar repeated patiently as though speaking to a child, "is outside."

Part of Will's brain immediately returned with: "**Bullshit**." But the amused look in Einar's eye told him that it was, perhaps, *not*. Hastily, the profiler tossed back his comforter and scrambled to his feet, squeaking just a little at the cold. The leopard, still lounging there, frowned at suddenly being buried in bedding. Will stumbled towards his window, however, and wrenched it open...only to be greeted by a lawn covered with a thin layer of frost and a very displeased black jaguar, tail flicking from side to side as he glared at the front door.

"What in the name of *fuck* are **you** doing here?!" Will squawked incredibly unattractively, mind tumbling at the sight. Startled, Perkūnas glanced up, gaze torn between rebuking after his time waiting in the cold, and pleased that such a wait was at an end

"Ah, William," he greeted as though his appearance was completely normal. "Are you going to let me in?" How a Daemon managed to remain regal while trespassing, Will didn't know, but somehow the creature managed it with a graceful ease.

"What?!" he returned, voice two octaves higher than he would have liked. "No!" He paused, glancing around his front lawn. "Where's Hannibal?" Because how the *hell* had a Daemon travelled such a distance without their human.

"At home, of course," the Daemon replied primly. "We are not bound by normal social conventions, William." He seemed somewhat put out, although Will was too perturbed to even attempt as to understand at what, mind too stunned at the implication that Hannibal and Perkūnas were just as odd as Will and Einar.

A nudge to his leg had him glancing down. Einar, in wolf form once again, was giving him what could only be described as puppy eyes...and Will never did well faced with such a look. He sighed exasperatedly, throwing his hands up in agitation. "Fine," he barked, before turning back out the window. "Fine, you lunatic, hang on."

The grin in reply was almost *feral*.

Will turned sharply to Einar. "If he eats any of the dogs, Daemon or not, I'm kicking you out of the house," he snapped, pointing a finger in his face. Einar only licked it, smirking when Will scowl deepened. "Why are you like that again anyway?"

"Please," Einar muttered, "it's not good to show your *entire* hand, Will." With that he took off, bounding down the stairs with all the enthusiasm of a child. Will sighed again, shutting the window, before heading to the bathroom was wash up quickly. He pulled on a pair of soft sweatpants, clean t-shirt and jumper after he'd finished before wandering down to face the awaiting Daemon.

His pack, not surprisingly, were on edge. They'd clearly noticed Perkūnas outside and were both concerned and intrigued by his presence. They'd taken to pushing their noses up against the glass, staring unabashed at the jaguar now sat on his porch. "Alright," he muttered, turning the lock and throwing open the door, letting the dogs stampede outside, charging first at Perkūnas and then onto the grass when he hissed at them. "Hey," Will snapped, scowling, "play *nice*," he ordered. Perkūnas, to his credit, looked suitably rebuked.

"Good morning," he greeted, tipping his head as Will walked out onto the porch, with Einar close behind. The wolf wasted no time, instead bounding up the jaguar and promptly shoving him to the ground. Perkūnas, at least, seemed quite amused by the greeting, remaining on his side as Einar slumped in a heap beside him, head resting on the rise and fall of the big-cat's chest, eyes watching the rest of the pack in the frosty grass. Suddenly the prissy Daemon was decidedly less concerned with the cold.

"Why are you here Kūnas?" Will asked tiredly. The Daemon looked at him curiously, clearly surprised by the impromptu nickname that had fallen from the blue-eyed man's loose lips, but too proud to admit any feelings about it.

The jaguar hesitated. "I do not make friends easily, Will," he began quietly, gaze pinned to him. "Unlike Hannibal, I am not fond of surrounding myself with great swathes of the human population, and other Daemons either frustrate me or are frightened by me, so I avoid them as thoroughly as their people. I am very much a solitary creature." He paused, risking a glance at Einar, before returning his gaze once more to Will. "It is refreshing to engage with a Daemon who might be my equal - someone who is not fearful of me, does not frustrate me, but challenges me all the same. I would be foolish not to pursue this avenue of...*friendship*."

Einar's gaze, turning to meet Will's, was nothing other that *smug*.

Will groaned but nodded. "Fine," he muttered, "you can hang out here whenever you want, but you play nice with the dogs, alright?"

"Of course," Perkūnas murmured, demure, relaxing and letting his head fall back onto the wood of the decking. Huffing in reply to Einar who shuffled even closer. Will rolled his eyes, instead busying himself with food for the dogs so not to address the knot in his stomach. After all, there were very few Daemons, solitary or not, who would willingly clamber over each other - and most instances of such were within pairs where their humans were already deep into a relationship. How he'd managed to let his Daemon become some sort of matchmaker was beyond Will, but even if what Perkūnas said was true, and that he and Hannibal were not closely tied as others, where the jaguar was, Will knew the Doctor wouldn't be *too* far behind. Surely, he couldn't be... besides who could possibly be unperturbed by the absence of their *soul*? Will shuddered at the thought, choosing instead to turn his mind to other things and ignore the notion that Hannibal's darkness extend far beyond what they initially believed.

After feeding the animals, and himself, (both successful actions to avoid thinking too deeply about what the *hell* was going on with himself, Einar, Hannibal and Perkūnas), Will chugged down a mug of coffee over some extra-curricular reading, before he changed, pulling on his thicker, winter clothes before heading outside. As visiting Daemon or not, it was a wonderful time to walk his dogs, so the jaguar could either put up and shut up, or stay put. The two Daemons stirred when he appeared, but only Einar stood up. Perkūnas looked a little confused but after the wolf grabbed his ear and tugged him to his feet, he relented, albeit cautiously. Admittedly Will was surprised by the acceptance, but he went with it... and so that was how Will ended up walking a pack of seven dogs, a wolf and a jaguar across the winter-coated flat fields surrounding his home.

Admittedly, it was one of the nicer walks he'd had. With the onset of winter, most of the trees stood naked, their branches black spindles stark against a white sky. The frost that morning not only left a thin carpet of white, but also meant the grass crunched beneath their feet as the animals gambolled about, breath coming in visible puffs that seemed to halo about their heads. After an hour and a half, Buster had taken it upon himself to scout out ahead, and finding their usual swimming spot free from frost, had promptly dived in, a bark signalled the rest, and they too quickly followed. Einar, practically howling out a laugh, had raced in after them, leaving only Perkūnas and Will to observe from the bank. The profiler had smiled, jerking his head and it seemed that was all the jaguar was waiting for, the Daemon leaping forward and submerging himself before amusingly joining in fetching sticks that Will threw for the dogs (although his aim was different as he only took them so the dogs couldn't). They spent a good twenty minutes playing in the hot-spring before Will called them all out, eager to get home and get them dry in the warmth of the fire. So began the trek back, through leaves bejewelled with white and over mud as hard as concrete, with dogs, a wolf and a big cat racing out ahead of him (not that there was much of a race with Perkūnas there). It was a truly amazing sight and Will paused to admire it.

It was, unfortunately, also how *they* found him.

He'd seen the magpie before, he was sure. Even with such a common animal, there was something *different* about this one. Something *other*. Not to mention something ran down his

spine, his instincts urging him to either run or hide because something *bad* was about to appear out of the bushes. It took only a few glances skywards to draw Perkūnas and Einar's attentions and only a single look for Perkūnas to declare the small bird was, in fact, a Daemon. It took even less time for the jaguar to bound up the tree, claws digging into the frosty bark, and frightening the creature perched amongst the branches who'd been convinced it was both safe, and unnoticed. It made an altogether unpleasant sound as it flapped its wings and cried out in shock. Will didn't even feel motivated to rebuke Perkūnas, despite the obvious fright the magpie had experienced, because it was just a little too funny and eased the nervousness in his stomach.

"Alright," he muttered, even more eager to get back, because he had a hunch as to just *who* the Daemon belonged. Sure enough, five minutes and one patch of stark red hair against the white landscape later, his worst fear was confirmed. "*Fuck*," he swore, hands tightening into fists.

Freddie Lounds stared at him from across the track, rapt at the sight. "Who is *that*?" Perkūnas demanded regally as he watched Einar press incredibly close to Will's side.

"Lounds," he replied stiffly, "she runs that *shitty-rag-of-a-magazine*, the Tattler."

"Ah," Perkūnas replied, muscles rippling beneath his wet fur.

The dogs, aware enough to know that Freddie wasn't welcome, loitered back, waiting for Will and Winston even bared his teeth. "Freddie," Will said, voice flat when he was finally a few metres away, "you know this is private property, right?" The woman smiled thinly, the magpie on her shoulder ruffling her feathers as though worried. Although, faced with the sight of Perkūnas, Will didn't particularly blame her.

"Really?" she replied. "My mistake," she paused, grinning, "while I'm here though -"

"Go away Freddie," Will snapped, sending his dogs onward with a flick of his wrist. They bounded back towards the house, a fuzzy outline on the near horizon, and Will continued forward. Unfortuately, the reporter fell in step beside him... well as beside him as she could with Einar pressed against one leg and Perkūnas against the other.

"I was going to ask about the Daemon Devourer," she began, "it's nearly been three months again, you know," she paused, but not to wait for an answer, because her eyes were glued to Perkūnas. "But actually, I'd rather ask about that. Portia told me your Daemon has a new form, and I almost didn't believe it," she paused, clearing her throat and Will realised that she must have been so focused on Kūnas that she'd misseen Einar as a new stray, or one of his existing dogs. "Unsurprising that it likes to attack other Daemons, Graham," she continued, unaware of her mistake, "especially given its human is so unstable. Tell me," she added, unaware of the low rumble beginning in Perkūnas's throat at the insult, "does Jack know that his pet has gone so off the rails that he's now got a Daemon so dangerous that it can kill an alligator?"

"A caiman," Will corrected, "kill a Caiman. They also have the strongest bite of any wild cat and like to stalk and ambush their prey." Because Will would have been *stupid* not to research the *shit* out of Hannibal's Daemon when it showed up on his porch.

Freddie paused, clearly taken aback by Will's apparent neutrality. "You're proud of that. Of having a panther for a Daemon?" Will was just about to correct her because *jaguar* not *panther*, but instead Freddie took a step forward and it seemed that was her mistake.

Perkūnas had been following the exchange closely and gave a sort of guttural, half roar, almost like someone coughing up a lung but three octaves lower, in reply. "*Step. Back.*" Perkūnas snarled, body dropping into a crouch.

Freddie's face paled violently in surprise and Portia twittered anxiously from her place on her shoulder. "*Freddie*," she pleaded, clearly feeling incredibly unsafe.

"*Portia,*" Freddie muttered, hand subconsciously going to run along the feathers of the bird in comfort, "it's **fine**. Graham can't let his Daemon *attack* me."

"You just told me its unsurprising he likes to attack Daemons," Will shot back, thoroughly amused and his spirits brightening tremendously at the display, because this was the first time anyone other than himself or Einar had defended him to Freddie. Even Jack, with all his bluster, had sent the woman away with a slap on the wrists and a caution at worst, ignoring the vicious and degrading lies she spewed about Will in garish font across page after page of the web.

Freddie's eyes narrowed. "You do anything to us Graham, and they'll cut your Daemon away," she snapped, fear lacing her tone.

"Well then," Will replied, tone turning icy at the threat, "I suppose it's a good thing he's actually not my Daemon then." Einar took the opportunity to poke his head around and snarl, joining the chorus of noise now pouring from Perkūnas' open mouth.

Incredibly, the woman's face paled even further. She took a step backward as Kūnas began to roll his shoulders in an attempt to pounce, before abandoning any subtlety and practically running to her car, Portia fluttering after her.

"*Low filthy, vile, rude, evil - cut his Daemon away, how **dare she** -* ," Perkūnas was snarling, claws digging deeper into the earth. When he lunged though, clearly intending to chase Freddie to her car and, potentially, beyond, Will lunged forward with an: "Ah, no you don't Kūnas, *shit,* stop!" and grabbed the back of his neck. The jaguar relaxed instantly, becoming almost boneless and the growl was abandoned for purrs. Yet that wasn't the most drastic change. The wave of warmth that invaded Will's body brought him to his knees and he was gasping back tears at the sheer avalanche of emotion raging through his body. He managed to wrench his hand away, fingers immediately digging into the soft, still damp fur of Einar with a spluttered cry. Immediately feeling dizzy at the change, he bowed his head, suddenly glad that Freddie was too focused on her own survival to linger and stare at him as he grabbed another man's Daemon on instinct and buckled under the intensity of it.

"Huh," the jaguar huffed, sounding just a little drunk, if that was possible. Clearly he was as surprised as Will. Instead of dignifying the sentence further however, or addressing what had happened in any way, he rubbed his face against Will's cheek, a purr breeding in his throat, before stepping forward and turning into Einar's gleeful nudge as he pulled away from Will.

Without so much as a glance behind, the pair ran off ahead, periodically wrestling each other into the ground leaving Will still kneeling in the frost.

"What the ever loving *fuck*?" Will muttered, glancing down at his hand, still tingling from contact with Perkūnas, and feeling the damp tears still tracking his features. He looked up once more at the wolf and the jaguar currently pulling on each other's tails and the only thought on his brain was how the hell he was going to explain all this to Hannibal.

Cecilia

Chapter Notes

sorry for the delay, but like life is super busy (will probs be another delay for a week) but thanks for your lovely comments so far - you're all amazing;

rights where they go, as per usual.

Enjoy,
-R.

Perkūnas was gone by the following morning, slipping out into the dark like a spirit, leaving no trace that he was ever there. If Will were not paired with Einar but rather a Daemon with a weaker will, he would have been nearly adamant that he hallucinated the entire day. Although there had been a small part of him convinced he'd been mistaken or dreamed the entire debacle. Until, of course, the jaguar reappeared eight hours later.

Then left again.

Then reappeared.

He appeared on a frustratingly sporadic, uneven pattern that spanned the entire weekend. It was Monday morning that Will woke and was greeted not with the amused face of a jaguar that had draped himself over his legs and his Daemon like a domesticated cat rather than a wild one, but to a stark black leopard looking frustratedly out of the window, eyes narrowed and countenance heavy, clearly convinced that now the week had once again begun, it would be some time before his companion again.

"You look unhappy," Will murmured, watching the long tail flick back and forth in a manner he could only describe as agitated.

"I miss Perkūnas," he confessed, rolling his shoulders and standing but maintaining his gaze.

Will harrumphed: it was too early in the morning to deal with *that* particular notion, even though a slight pit had opened in his stomach because he felt the same. There was something desperately intoxicating about the wave of overwhelming warmth and peace that flooded his system every time his skin grazed against the fur of Hannibal's Daemon. And Perkūnas had been more than generous with such touches: rubbing against his knees, thighs, dragging his head over Will's hand, clearly asking for a scratch or to be petted. The weekend, while seemingly average, had been the best he'd felt in some time - and there was a sense of dread that filled him at the knowledge that it might be some time before he could indulge himself again. He groaned, rebuking his thoughts, and glared at his soul because **why** did Einar have

to be so damn true to Will's emotions and thoughts. Why should everyone see his mind laid out before them? He tossed back his covers and rose, washed, dressed and proceeded to run through the motions of his day. Given he had lectures at the Academy, he tried to move with some purpose, ignoring the growing twitch in his hand, but he wasn't exactly looking forward to going in, instead catching himself looking out of the window for the figure of a jaguar, or hoping to spend yet another day wandering over fields.

His sudden distaste for society, and the Academy in general, may not just have stemmed from leaving the sanctity of his tremendously peaceful weekend, but also because he'd see Jack, possibly Alana, and maybe even Freddie. There had been a growing worry at just what Freddie had done with the knowledge about him acquiring an extra Daemon (although there had been nothing on the Tattler since their interaction three days previously) - a worry that flared to life in the absence of his new feline companion. It took a moment, though, before he realised that there was a distinct probability that Hannibal and Perkūnas would be present too, and hope roared to life in his chest. The psychiatrist had been in possession of the Daemon Devourer file for a couple of days and had been eager to reconvene with Jack after such a time, so surely he'd be present soon. But as quickly as it appeared, the anticipation burned out and turned to ash in his mouth, because it wouldn't be the same; *touching* Perkūnas in public would be social suicide, not to mention the epitome of rudeness and violation. Will didn't even want to consider the ramification of it thus far - especially as Hannibal seemed to have *no knowledge of it occurring at all*.

He sipped his coffee as he watched Einar skulk around the house, despondent. Will frankly didn't want to delve into the psychology of he and his soul being so damn *dependant*. Perkūnas was funny, engaging and interesting - captivating even - but he was dark, secretive and dangerous, as was his human, and Will had more than enough danger in his life without actively inviting more. It didn't stop the feelings burrowing into his chest however.

The leopard threw himself to the floor with a huff, startling Winston who had been watching, half amused and half confused. "Hey," Will called, disbelieving and tossing a hand out in a half shrug, channelling every strength he had because his need to be around the Daemon was frankly ridiculous, "last time I checked your form wasn't a love-sick puppy, Einar." His Daemon barely twitched, instead cracking open one eye and putting as much of a glare as he could into the minute expression, because he *knew*. Of course he knew.

"Alright," Will snorted, chucking back the rest of his drink and pouring another cup into his flask. "Get your ass in gear," he ordered, jerking his chin towards the car. He turned away, not waiting to see if his Daemon was going to obey, and instead laid out some more food and water for the dogs as well as grab his coat and bag from the table. Luckily the leopard had complied, although he was clearly pissed about doing so, given that he'd shifted into a snake and curled himself around the post on the porch. "You're such a little shit, you know that right?" Will snapped, half angry with himself at the torrent of emotions washing over him, before locking the door and turning.

"If you weren't feeling unhinged and *not yourself* then I wouldn't be in this form," Einar replied coldly. "You can't ignore what we are to them by diving into other headspaces Will. You can't deny it." The profiler didn't reply, instead plucking the snake from his place around the wood and draped him over his shoulders. What could he say? Einar was right. Denial and

avoidance were always Will's best defence and once again, that was manifesting in the shape of his soul. So once more he denied and ignored and avoided, instead pilling into the car, putting it drive and speeding towards the FBI Academy.

The drive wasn't too bad, although with a stony silence from the reptile hovering by his ear, it felt considerably longer than it usually did. His Daemon was just as talented as him when it came to maintaining silence. By the time he'd parked, fished his things out of the car and begun to walk, he had barely twelve minutes to reach his classroom before his lecture began. It was easier than usual however because of the form Einar inhabited. Usually he might have a question or two as he passed, people braving his gruff exterior and 'unstable' soul to enquire about death and murder. When a snake was hanging about his shoulders, not a single person, other than Jack of course, would stop him. After all, the mere sight of a Inland Taipan was frightening, but knowing Einar (and that he was even more temperamental when in such a form) everyone steered clear. He ducked into the building and walked briskly through the hallways, checking his watch for the time.

"Will!" a voice called. He didn't need to turn to know it was Alana. "Will." The profiler spun on his heel, the darker part of him enjoying the flash of panic that flashed across Alana's face as she registered Einar's shape.

"Alana," he greeted, "look I have class and-"

"Don't worry," she cut him off, "Jack's asked for cover." She offered a half smile but it looked more like a grimace.

"You're wanted in the office," Cecilia added from her place by Alana's side, considerably less cowed by Einar in comparison to her human but still maintaining a safe distance.

Will grunted out a: "*thanks*," to which the Trumpeter swan dipped her head in reply before turning and waddling away with Alana following. The man dragged a hand through his hair, suddenly bone tired, because while he had often had conflicting feelings concerning Alana and her professional-curiosity of him and held a vague dislike for Cecilia, Einar hated them both. Especially Cecilia.

It had begun with Alana's vague sort-of-interest with him that Will would later categorise as being led-on. He knew, deep down, that Alana never wanted to hurt him on any level, but couldn't hold back the interest in his mind. She had danced around, made light of his hesitant advances but never out-right turned him away. And, well, she had been pretty enough for him to ask a couple of times. By the time he was starting to think about kissing her, he was, if he was honest, going through the motions - pursuing because he'd spent too much time on her *not* to. It was then that Einar, always uncomfortable under the invasive and curious stares of both Alana and Cecilia, began to act out. As Will's heart fell off pace and his head picked up the reins, Einar began to pull away, baring his teeth at Cecilia if she came within a metre of him. And while neither Daemon had never touched, Einar had allowed the swan to sit beside him on several occasions. Unfortunately, Cecilia was proud and a little snobbish, turning the dislike she was shown into a snide, wordy assault. Rather than simply accept the discomfort for what it was, she seemed determine to see the *personal* in it. It hadn't taken Will's Daemon long to begin truly hating her. That started the long, snappy, barbed remarks to Will when in private and the occasional threatening lunge when in public. Alana and Will had

long accepted their incompatibility by the day of 'the incident' - where after a particularly trying day, as Will had argued with Alana and Jack, Einar had swooped down from his place perched on one of the shelves, talons outstretched, picked up Cecilia and flung her across the room.

It had been three weeks before Alana spoke to Will again.

It was no doubt one of the reasons that Jack had brought in Hannibal, Will thought. He wanted Will to be steered, or at least observed, on cases, and knew that asking Alana was a disaster waiting to happen.

As he did on all other occasions, the snake waited until they were both out of earshot before he began the tirade of curses about how he'd pluck off the swan's flight feathers and bite her in the beak. It was incredibly colourful and disturbingly dark but also incredibly funny, especially in the hissing, rasping tones of his Daemon. But even with the displeasure, the pair still followed behind, trailing reluctantly, both fiercely longing for the weekend they'd just left behind. And for the Daemon who'd filled the hours of it.

Alana pushed open the door to Jack's office and let Cecilia through before propping it open for Will, who thanked her with a thin smile. Jack, already present, looked up in greeting from behind his desk, Aurick, lay in the dog bed to one side also raised his head, but Will wasn't interested in either of them. He was transfixed by another pair of eyes who had been focused on the case file laid out before him until Will had entered the room. Immediately, warmth filled him and the world seemed to right itself just a little.

Then, a voice.

"So a snake too, little one?" Perkūnas laughed from his corner of the room, drawing gazes and startling everyone but Will with the nickname. Einar hissed in excitement and launched himself forward, shifting as he went before bounding over in his wolf form and throwing himself on top of the jaguar. Perkūnas laughed again as Einar struggled to find a comfortable position and eventually just draping half his body over the Daemon below him.

"Oh my," Cecilia said, stunned and staring stupidly at the pair. "What is - what -" she broke off, turning to her human.

"*Will*," Jack hissed, pulling all attention back to him. "*What is your Daemon doing*?"

"You know what Jack?" Will replied, shaking his head, ignoring the way his lips turned into a genuine smile. "At this point in time, I couldn't tell you." He turned back to the Daemons. "Seriously you two?" The pair glanced over, smug and unapologetic. "You're both, you're just, I mean *ugh*... this is not the best place. We *are* in public."

"Honestly William -"

"Don't bullshit your way out of this Kūnas," Will cut the jaguar off, holding back a laugh at the hefty snort from Einar. "And you," he whirled on his Daemon with an outstretched finger, "don't encourage him."

"Perkūnas," Hannibal said, *finally* finding his voice, although it was aghast and far from assertive.

"No," Kūnas replied to the question his human had apparently asked as he finished settling down.

"This is far from *proper*, Perkūnas," Cecilia continued, waddling forward, her voice echoing the sentiment that currently painted Alana's cheeks with a blush.

Einar turned at that, baring his teeth in a snarl, only stopping the growl in his throat when the jaguar butted the side of his face with his head. Cecilia shot back, alarmed, and Alana whirled on Will as though he had any control at all over his wayward Daemon.

"I think Einar and I are just *fine* with being improper, Cecilia, but thank you," Perkūnas replied once the wolf had tucked his head underneath his own and rested on the wild cat's paws.

"I -"

"Look," Will jumped in, cutting Alana off, "can we just focus on the case?" His eyes were imploring, but there was a steel there too.

"Sure." Unsurprisingly it was Jack who relented, more determined to catch a killer than unravel another layer to the mind of Will Graham. He stood, beckoning Will to his desk to view the files. Alana, in response, took a step closer to Hannibal, whose eyes still hadn't wavered from the sight of the two, sprawling Daemons before him, and wrapped a hand around his arm. It was gentle, and subtle, but there was enough sub-context there to write a book. *Alana-and-Hannibal* or at least Alana wanted an *Alana-and-Hannibal* and that made Will's stomach turn. It was surprising to feel so defensive of a man who he'd barely said a word to, but there it was.

Probably because Einar had been right: Hannibal and Perkūnas were for he and Will. Alana and Cecilia didn't factor into it. Not to mention that Perkūnas would eat Cecilia alive. A swan and a jaguar? Who ever heard of such a match?

Eventually Hannibal smiled tightly and turned away, seating himself back in the chair beside Will where he hovered over the desk, delving through the files. Alana occupied the other free chair. Once there was a relative ease on the room, Jack turned to the Doctor. "Thoughts, then, Dr. Lecter," he prompted.

"Yes, of course," the man began, voice velvety but just a touch *off*. He was rattled, and clearly unhappy about it. "The Daemon Devourer is not like most serial killers - even those that mutilate Daemons. There must be a particular brutality in a man to butcher both the mind and soul simultaneously, while ensuring that there is just enough time for both to witness and endure the other's pain. Yet his anger is not solely at the humans, nor solely at the Daemons, but rather a mix of the two. This is considerably unique and I would wager manifests as something that has been treated, or at least seen, by a psychiatric professional at one point in time. Acquaintances may call him anti-social or reclusive, although most would know very little of him to offer an opinion. His rage towards humans is no doubt a product of feeling

both inadequate in the presence of and therefore persecuted by common people. This is someone who means to remove the humanity from his victims, so he himself feels that to some extent, he is, or has not been treated as, human. His anger at Daemons may be a result of persecution for an unusual one," his eyes flickered to Will for a split-second, "or could be the result of something much more drastic. A soul severed, perhaps."

"Surely if his Soul had been removed, he would be coveting them, not punishing them," Alana countered.

"Unless his Soul didn't match his view," Will added, repeating the theory he had held from the beginning but had been denied at every turn. Jack sighed heavily, but Hannibal just looked intrigued.

"How so?" he prompted, gaze fixing itself to Will's own.

"In some rare cases, usually where multiple, chronic mental health issues are present, individuals have expressed dysphoria with their soul. Claims of mismatching or incorrect settling are rare, admittedly, but they can happen. If our killer feels he had been a victim of such a thing, he would seek to punish those who exactly match with the forms of their soul," Will paused, picking up the file. "The latest victim, Sarah O'Dane, was a petite, relatively unremarkable brunette, who was highly social and enjoyed sex and life and everything that that entailed. Her Daemon, Freya, was a sparrow - a form that has frequently in mythological standing been associated with sociability, lust and sexual freedom, as well as being physically nondescript. While I don't particularly like Daemon profiling, Sarah was an instance of her soul matching remarkably well with her personality, in *every aspect*. There are few that compare so thoroughly. For someone derisive of their own Daemon form, she would be an insult to him, and to his struggle to connect with a Daemon that didn't embody him."

There was a moment of silence.

"He opens them up," Hannibal began slowly, eyes burning with something dark and curious and almost wonder-filled, "to see if the similarities continue inside. He wants to explore every aspect and peel them back, layer by layer. He's seeking understanding." Another pause. "He's exploring."

Will nodded, feeling a little unsteady as something warm unfurled in his stomach at both the gaze and the analysis that had, for so long, been living only in his head. "That's what I see, when I look at him."

Alana heaved a breath, breaking the moment. "I'm still in favour of a persecuted soul," she argued stubbornly. "There is much more evidence that this is the case, not to mention much less speculation as to the actions of someone suffering from such a thing."

"It's not a case of soul severing," Jack countered, sounding tired, "we've checked almost all within all the surrounding states in the past two years."

"I find myself concurring with Will, Jack," Hannibal finally said, maroon coloured orbs still drinking in the profiler's features. "I presume you have noticed a pattern in the earlier victims too Will?"

"The first three victims, it's much less obvious, but by the forth and fifth, it's perhaps as close as one could possibly get. Given there are no other common factors: age, sex, ethnicity, gender and sexuality are *all* varied, as are their locations, jobs, hobbies and interests, it must be related to the Daemons. Otherwise, I have no idea how he's choosing them," Will replied, keeping his gaze to the desk and papers, ignoring the hole being burnt on the side of his face by the psychiatrist.

"It might do well to pursue this further, as much as is possible," Hannibal said, finally turning to Jack. "Perhaps consider hospital, psychiatric and juvenile records with any reference to someone being unsatisfied with their soul, even when still shifting."

"Well, what good would that do?" Alana asked, hand reaching out to rest against Hannibal's arm.

"Chances are if he's unhappy *then*, settling won't have done anything to help him," Will replied, tone a little curt, as his eyes narrowed at the motion. "Not to mention that children get sent to the Doctors by guardians but adults don't have anyone forcing them to do so. The killer wouldn't willingly place himself into such a situation as to be pulled apart and analysed. This is someone who desires control in all parts of his life -"

"To compensate where he has no control at all," Hannibal finished for him, smiling just a little.

Jack sighed again, breaking the moment. "Well I suppose it's all we've got, even if it's unlikely to yield any results," he huffed, standing. "Would you care to accompany us Doctor? It might do well to have two respected Doctors present when we request access to files." The grip on Hannibal's armed tightened.

The man looked surprised but nodded, a smile quirking at his lips. He rose steadily. "I have always wanted to peak behind the curtain," he said in way of reply.

"Great," Jack smiled, ushering them from the office, a new purpose in his step. Einar and Perkūnas dragged themselves to their feet, falling in step behind Will who was the last out. Hannibal glanced back, clearly curious as to just why his Daemon wasn't beside him, and frowning a little at the sight that greeted him before turning back to Jack who was speaking once more.

"He doesn't know, does he?" Will asked, jerking his head towards Hannibal, and not able to stop himself from scowling at Alana who was still standing *too close*. "About this, about *us*."

Perkūnas smiled up at him, clearly happy with his word-choice, with his green eyes mischievous and untold secrets bleeding from his lips.

"I told you William," he replied, voice smooth and reassuring but still overwhelmingly smug. "We aren't bound by social norms."

Mallory

Chapter Notes

ah thank you for ya patience lovelies, been a busy old few days! bit of an interlude chapter cos exams take a lot outta ya haha!

rights where they go of course,

all the best, and omgosh its nearly christmas!
-R.

Much to Will's frustration, Alana maintained her closeness to Hannibal throughout their admittedly pointless trek to the three nearest facilities to enquire about Soul Dysphoria. They had been met with a barrage of patient-doctor confidentiality, a couple of disapproving looks, some remarkably crude remarks as to the closeness between Einar and Perkūnas (although luckily the former remained in one form and so Will was spared the psychobabble he'd usually receive for him), and one possible suspect (although he turned out to be practically catatonic between the psychotic break he'd endured four years previously and the cocktail of heavy medication the staff kept him on). All in all, Will was frustrated...although the presence of Perkūnas had steadied both his temper and Einar's.

It was something that didn't go unnoticed by Hannibal.

The man had been slowly inching closer to Will throughout their exploration of his theory, selecting not only to stand beside him or shoulder to shoulder, but also to hover over Will when he sat or lingered to read through paperwork after discovering he was an inch or so taller than the younger profiler. Hannibal had begun to occupy Will's space as though it was his to claim and while feeding the warmth in the pit of Will's stomach, it was dangerously close to possessive, blurring the line too much to remain comfortable. This was a man showing the world that Will was spoken for...whether he knew so or not.

Something Will had said seemed to have sparked not only interest, but *dark interest,* in the older Doctor. The intensity of his stare, the needy way he tracked the profiler's thoughts, words and the bob of his adam's apple, not to mention the general focus as Will spoke, was as heady as much as it was confusing. Perkūnas seemed to finally represent his human - Hannibal was proud and proper and possessive once attention was given, but one had to *earn* that attention. Perkūnas had known instantly what Hannibal had just figured out - that Will was *fascinating* - and somehow the profiler's insights into the truly deplorable were the key to understanding this. That was yet another notion he *really* ***didn't*** want to talk about. But his Daemon's words kept ringing in his ears, overlapping and reverberating as though they had a mind of their own. Over and over: "*I smelt blood on them*."

Suddenly the notion of just *how much blood* was clawing at the front of Will's mind. It was becoming clearer and clearer that Hannibal was every bit as dark as all others who found Einar fascinating, but unlike all those others, this monster had an intention to stick around. His Daemon had already begun to slip in between the cracks and nest underneath the thin skin that Will wielded to keep out the demons of the dark and deplorable, and it seemed the Doctor himself was quickly following suit.

While Jack and Aurick had been relatively blind to the development in Hannibal's attentions, it seemed that Alana and Cecilia were not.

Not. At. All.

Frequently throughout their tedious and ultimately pointless excursions, the swan had attempted to navigate closer to the jaguar. At first it was through innocent gestures that were as close to 'natural' as possible. A shuffle to the side, a stretching of her wings, a curious glance at something just over Perkūnas' shoulder: the movements were just subtle enough to slip under the radar of the humans surrounding her. Except Will of course. Will who was still feeling a growing presence of unease at the notion of Perkūnas-and-Cecilia and a more than unsettled shake in his hands at the thought of Hannibal-and-Alana. But it seemed that the blue-eyed profiler had, at least for the moment, little to worry about when it came to the swan, even when her movements strayed into the bold, daring, blatant *almost-shove-Einar-out-of-the-way*. Mainly because although Einar was always there to block whichever advancement that Alana's Daemon was attempting, Perkūnas himself had also taken up the role of rebuffing the approaches with equal, if not greater, enthusiasm. And while his rebukes were much more polite than Einar, they were still refusals. Perkūnas had made his choice, and he was being vocal about it. And he had chosen a multi-formed, half feral, apparently mute Daemon over the graceful lines of a swan who, perhaps, symbolised elegance. Which only added to the complications around the intentions of the two.

Because Will *trusted* Perkūnas. Trusted that his interest was genuine, there was no deception in the calm he gained from being touched by Will, and found joy in Einar. Will didn't feel similarly about Hannibal. Humans were layered and complicated and filled with social expectation and bias and intention. Dr Lecter seemed like one to let lots of *other* things rule his decisions, rather than the hormones that swam in his veins and the feelings that burned through his heart.

Hannibal and Perkūnas were dangerous.

But, then again, so were he and Einar.

By the time they had returned to the Academy at the end of a particularly long day, Will was feeling just a little unsettled by the entire situation. His skin was a touch too tight and his mind was itching. Einar had taken to bumping into his legs in clear support and it quickly became apparent that Perkūnas wished to do the same, but knew that even in his current mood of 'fuck society and social expectation', it might be a little to much to accept for those firmly set within the realms of propriety. And for Hannibal of course. Hannibal who seemed desperate to climb inside his head and read the thoughts there.

Unluckily for Will and the beckoning notion of whiskey and sleep, Beverley took that moment to appear, her mischievous otter Daemon Mallory perched on her shoulder, and both their faces as sallow and worried as a pair could be. It was neither comforting, nor natural, and Will felt Einar's hackles raise beside him.

"Hey guys," she greeted, voice flat, as she handed Jack a file. "We've got a problem." There was a pause where she raised her eyebrows at Perkūnas and Einar, their tails practically entwined, before she shook herself back into focus. "I got a call from a friend of mine in a department in New Jersey," she began. "They weren't sure what to make of it, so they sent me the files. The bodies are on the way too."

"Bodies?" Jack asked, flipping too quickly through the papers to really gauge any sort of understanding.

"It's him, Jack," Bev said, crossing her arms tightly, "the Daemon Devourer," she added with all the bitter disgust she could muster.

"He's early," Alana breathed, Cecilia fidgeting uncomfortably by her side.

"He's never early," Jack replied, passing the file, complete with horrifying photographs, to Will. It barely took a glance to confirm, but by the time he emerged from breaking open the chest of Simon Guttenberg and stuffing the remains of the plucked, and skinned, crow inside the empty cavity, Einar was on the floor clad once more in scales.

"It's him," Will croaked, slipping his fingers underneath his glasses and rubbing desperately at his eyes, as though to erase the vision of what he'd just seen. Perkūnas huffed once, dropping down to the floor to let Einar climb up onto his back, wrap his body around the jag's neck for balance and rest his head atop of Perkūnas'. Luckily those around them were too preoccupied with the new, unprecedented break in pattern.

"You okay Will?" Mallory asked, concerned. The profiler offered the otter a tight smile but didn't reply. He liked Mallory - and he didn't want to lie.

"When'd you say the bodies will be here?" Jack asked, passing the new murder file to Hannibal.

"A day or two, I think," Bev replied. "I can check with them and transport?"

"Yeah," Jack said, nodding his head, turning to talk to Alana.

There was a moment where red burned through Will's vision and blood slicked the walls. Where not only Simon and his crow Daemon, but also Elisa, the woman that had been killed alongside him, and her mouse Daemon, stood in front of him. Their chests brutalised, ribs pulled back and hacked apart; their skin slipping down over the empty cavity that had been pillaged of its organs; the violence in the black bruises on Elisa's face and wrists, where she'd been beaten, tied up and forced to watch as her boyfriend and his Daemon were flayed and defiled and broken into pieces. The corridor was oozing blood and tears, the walls gory and heavy with the thick stench of iron and decomposition. It was closing in on him, Will lost beneath a mountain of violence and desperation; his mind drowning in the justification of a

monster who wanted nothing more than to burn down the world and make people *see* what he truly was. It was all too much and it all swarmed before him, until: "Are you sure you're alright, Will?"

The blue eyed man looked up at Hannibal for a moment, unsure, but then a comforting hand came down on his shoulder and something warm spread through him and banished the smell of death and the feel of blood on his hands. And suddenly he found that he couldn't help himself. "Not really," he muttered, just out of ear-shot of the others. "I see it. I see it like *I* do it."

"The price of such a gift."

"It's a curse."

Hannibal laughed. "Most would see it as a gift, Will. You can assume any point of view. You can see the world through the eyes of nearly every person upon it. You can experience and cherish things that most people couldn't imagine in their wildest thoughts."

"I also see the worst in people. Sometimes, Doctor, when you see the worst, you can't see the best."

His words made Hannibal frown, something sad but determined flooding his gaze. "There is beauty, there is *art,* in everything Will," he murmured. "Even the most tragic, the most violent, the most inexplicable horrors, can have a quiet, understated art to them," he paused, offering a smile, "you just have to *look* for it."

"Thank you Doctor Lecter," Will conceded, "but most of the monsters I inhabit aren't looking to make their victims **beautiful**."

"Of course not," Hannibal relented, stepping away and noticing the two Daemons wrapped around each other. He grimaced slightly, clearly conveying his disapproval to Perkūnas, which was met with an upturned nose and obvious indifference, before looking back at Will. "They're quite enamoured," he said.

"It's nice," Will replied tentatively, "Einar doesn't make friends easily." The older Doctor only hummed. "It's because you and Kūnas are odd too," he added, ignoring the raised eyebrows and instead fixing his gaze forward, watching the pair trot off ahead after Bev, Mallory, Jack, Aurick, Alana and Cecilia, who were moving back towards the lab. "You're a bit like us. Einar likes that...I like that."

"How so?" Hannibal asked, voice layered with amusement.

"Most Daemons can't travel more than a few hundred metres away from their humans," Will started. "And we live an hour away from each other, by car."

"I -"

"Perkūnas visits us," Will clarified. "Einar and I."

There was a pause. "He...*visits* you?"

"Yes," he replied, blue eyes meeting maroon.

"Will! Hannibal!" Alana shouted, pulling their attention away from each other and where they had stopped in the middle of the hallway. She was stood, hand on her hip in the middle of the hallway, clearly frustrated. Although Will was sure the sole recipient of her frustration was aimed at him. It was clear then just how much he would like her out of his life.

"I don't like her touching you," Will confessed, suddenly desperate for Hannibal to *understand*. For him to know just what he and Perkūnas gave back to himself and to Einar. He wanted the man to hear the peace and calm he craved in the tone of his voice. He wanted Hannibal to see just how far he'd go to keep what he had been gifted. "And I don't like Cecilia trying to touch Perkūnas."

Another pause.

"I am not enthused by the prospect either, dear Will." The words were slow, hesitant. Honest, but testing, because Hannibal still didn't understand.

Will sighed. "I know we aren't that well acquainted, Doctor," he began, looking back to Hannibal and tossing away the image of Alana, confused and impatient, trying to read their conversation in their lips and the angles of their body. "But would you like to be?"

A small smile. "Yes, dear Will. I think I would."

Bass & Cassius

Chapter Notes

> happy new year everyone! hope everyone had an amazing time off and enjoyed the hols!
>
> sorry for the delay, but here's the next chapter (rights to those who deserve them, as per usual, lovelies)
>
> all the best,
> -R.

It was two days before the bodies of the unprecedented Devourer killing arrived in the mortuary and in that time, Will had seen Hannibal and Perkūnas only once: at a coffee shop situated halfway between their houses.

It had been proclaimed as 'neutral' territory by the Doctor when he called the blue-eyed man at eight thirty that morning to extend the invitation. "I believe we were past due to be well acquainted, don't you think Will?" he had said, tone almost *flirty* as he echoed Will's words. "And Perkūnas would like to see you again," he added, as though that confession was nothing, rather than the incredible notion it was. Will had been obliging from Hannibal's first word, although just about managed to keep himself from agreeing before the Doctor had finished speaking, waiting at least until the pause carved out for his response. Einar, too, was eager - far too eager - to see the pair again, and both were almost jittery at the prospect. Probably because it was the first time that they were meeting with *intention* and *innuendo* woven through their interactions.

It had been a somewhat tentative affair, both humans just a little too hesitant around each other to really make the most of their opportunity. Their uncertainty wasn't aided by their Daemons who had, much to their mutual surprise, been on immaculate behaviour. Einar, in his owl form, had sat on the back of Will's chair and happily preened his feathers, while Perkūnas had dozed at Hannibal's feet, eyes opening only thrice during the whole date. It seemed, at least to Will, that the Daemons were giving their humans a chance to match the pace they had already set and catch up to the level of familiarity they'd gained. That was yet another unnerving notion, but just like all the others, Will rolled with it.

After all, while it had been a little bit awkward, it had been wonderful too. Wonderful to just escape the macabre of his world and sit with a man and his Daemon who were more than willing to offer he and Einar peace.

The place Hannibal had picked was warm and welcoming. With long, dark wooden floors; naked brick walls lined with the menu scrawled in calligraphy on blackboards; and vintage strings of lights dangling from the wooden beams that spanned the ceiling, it was the type of

place that hosted students, regulars and the occasional internet critic. The loud rattle of the coffee machines and the casual chat between customer and barista spoke volumes of its relaxed nature. Yet the smell in the air: fresh pastry and ground Columbian beans was inviting, mouth-watering and a loud indication that they were serving good stuff. All in all, it was *not* a place Will might have expected Hannibal to frequent, although given the smile the tired-eyed blonde gave him from behind the counter when they entered, he was known at least.

"Good morning, Doctor Lecter," she greeted politely, offering Will a brief smile too. "Would you like your usual, sir?"

"Yes please, thank you, Melissa," Hannibal replied, before turning to Will, "and whatever my companion would like."

It was after their coffee had been brewed and brought over to the comfortable, out of the way table tucked between a window and a large plant, under a string of lights, that Hannibal explained. "This is the only place that is quiet, pleasant and whose staff seem to know how to brew my order within driving distance of my house," he explained, something in his tone that spoke of how important those characteristics were.

"Ah," Will replied, glancing down at his *black-one sugar-regular coffee-please*, and feeling just a little out of place. A small huff, a kind smile and a gentle probing question about his childhood struck up the conversation and banished his thoughts of inadequacy.

They traded questions for a while, offering vague answers in places of uncertainty and deflections in places of discomfort. Will gathered quickly that Hannibal's own childhood was *not* something he was comfortable discussing. A quick glance at Perkūnas and the profiler read the sorrow and fear and *danger* in the jaguar's expression when Hannibal had mentioned the word: *sister*. It didn't take an expert to know that something bad had happened - no doubt something that had shaped Hannibal as a person, and as something *more* too.

Will also learned about Hannibal's love of classical music, art and exquisite food. He watched the man describe in rather excruciating detail the best way to present a dish that he couldn't even remember the name of. And while at times stilted, three hours passed in a moment, and Will was certain he'd made the right decision in asking Hannibal for a chance. It was clear the chemistry that Perkūnas and Einar shared was not unfounded. There was something there, if Will was willing to overlook the more unsavoury aspects of Hannibal's personality and the illegality that came hand-in-hand with that.

They'd parted with smiles and, much to Will's embarrassment, a kiss on the cheek. The Doctor had seemed pretty smug when he pulled away and viewed the sudden redness flushing over the profiler's face. Perkūnas had chuckled, nudged Einar who had perched himself on a bench, before falling in step with his human. The owl, flying up to settle on Will's shoulder had waited until Hannibal and Perkūnas had glanced back, offered a wave and then disappeared from sight before he tittered and said: "You *like* him."

The blush on Will's face doubled at that.

Seeing Hannibal again only stirred up those emotions - even if they were stood over what remained of Simon and Elisa. Their Daemons were gone, having turned to dust shortly following their deaths, meaning Will was at least spared the horror of seeing them. Although something told him that he might just be able to with Perkūnas and Hannibal there. Pathetic, he thought, but somehow that was alright by him.

The bodies were much as he expected. Violent, bloody, and they turned his stomach. The Devourer had certainly lived up to his name.

The lab was already full when he and Einar first arrived: Jack and Aurick, Hannibal and Perkūnas, Alana and Cecilia, Beverly and Mallory and, of course Price and his mouse Daemon Bass and Zeller and his tom-cat Daemon Cassius. They all turned as one when Will shoved open the door and slipped inside, Einar - once more wearing black fur - made a beeline for Perkūnas. It seemed his best behaviour had waned now company that might encroach on his time with Kūnas was present. The jaguar greeted him happily from his place lay on the floor, butting his head and even going as far as to lick a long stripe across the wolf's head, which Einar huffed at but seemed more than delighted with the affection. He rolled onto his back, baring his belly and letting Perkūnas rest his head there.

"Good god, you *weren't* kidding," Cassius snorted, voice haughty, tail flicking from side to side from his place on top of the drawers, his eyes fixed on the pair. "The weird one has a *friend,*" he laughed.

"Oh *fuck off,* you mutt."

There was a long, stunned silence, because that was *not* what they were expecting Perkūnas to say. In fact, none present were really expecting Kūnas to say anything. Then Mallory started laughing: gut wrenching laughs that saw her topple off Bev's shoulder and onto the table beside her.

"Perkūnas!" Cecilia exclaimed, startled and almost horrified. She flapped her wings a couple of times, as though to shake off the apparent indecency of what she had heard, before taking a step forward. Einar rolled back onto his belly as Kūnas turned and flashed his teeth at her in warning.

"Well, well, boys," Bev grinned, just as amused as her Daemon, "should we be expecting an announcement soon?"

Will blushed bright red and incredibly Hannibal himself looked a little flustered. "Maybe if our humans weren't emotionally repressed idiots, Beverly, yes," Perkūnas replied, all poise and pride back into his voice.

Another long silence.

"Holy shit," Zeller muttered, eyes pinning themselves to Will. "Graham?"

"I would really like to look at these murders now," he hissed, "*Jack*?"

And ever the diplomatic workhorse, Jack yielded, pulling out case files and jerking his head in a silent message for Will to *get-the-hell-over-here-and-don't-speak-unless-asked-a-murder-related-question* - something Will was more than happy to get behind. Hannibal did offer him a quiet, understated smile as he passed though: projecting his partial amusement but also his begrudging acceptance of his Daemon's antics. There was something beneath his gaze though that Will couldn't quite read.

"Any forensic evidence so far?" Will asked, ignoring the pulsing sensation at the base of his head that he just slip into the killer's headspace and float off into the abyss.

"We found a couple of dog hairs - neither of them had pets - but I don't think it's Daemon," Bev began, kind enough to see that Will wanted something *normal*. "Bruises are pretty bad - she was clearly kept for a while before he killed her. She was struggling, more than usual, so bastard probably made her watch as he killed her boyfriend. If I had to guess, she was alive a couple of days longer than Simon. Not sure why." Another pause. "He took trophies: one of the kidney's from Elisa, but both kidneys and the lungs from Guttenberg."

"Bite marks, too," Price chimed in, pointing at Elisa. "It was hard to see with all the bruising, but he definitely bit her. Here," he said, pointing first at the woman's cheek and then down towards the inside of her left thigh. "No dental matches so far, despite the unique signature," he continued, but Will was no longer listening.

"He *bit* her," Will muttered.

"Will -" Jack prompted, curious and frustrated at his interruption in equal measure.

"That's intimate. That's *really* intimate, Jack." He turned back to Bev. "Any sign of sexual assault?"

"None," Zeller answered instead, "which is surprising because sicko's like this like to go the whole way."

And it was then that things became clear.

It wasn't as though *everything* made excruciatingly sense, but the light-bulb that had just flickered on cast away every shadow in his mind, leaving only a handful of shady, gloomy places where knowledge could lurk. Because this killer had just stepped into the light, his actions like beacons to a mind that *understood* and *saw.* There were things about this killer that Will didn't want to know, but suddenly he could see the desperate, eager, wishful, longing that ran like a pulsing vein beneath his actions.

"It's not - *holy shit* - Jack, it's not about hating them," Will began, ignoring the disbelieving looks that turned to him in an instant. "It's not about debasing them. He wants to see inside, he want to know them, he wants to *be them*. We knew that. But it, it's..." He took in a breath, glancing at Hannibal and knowing instantly that the man *understood*. "He's early because it wasn't working. Looking inside wasn't working, so he's upped his game. He just wants people to see him, to understand him, let him become, and he has to touch and embrace them..."

"Will -" Jack prompted, exasperated.

"He's consuming them now," Will muttered, mind tumbling down the thought path without any consent from him. "He wants whatever they have and he can't just look anymore, he had to touch, to feast. Let them become him."

"Let their strength meld into his," Hannibal added, voice surprisingly level. The profiler looked up, locking gazes and offering a nod.

"Yes."

"That's a leap, Will," Jack returned, eyes narrowed. "And there are far more likely scenarios." A pause and a quick glance at Alana. "This screams rage and anger."

"He is angry -"

"But not at them, not really...?" Jack grumbled. "That's not - look Will, you said yourself you don't like this one, that he's difficult," the man began gruffly, "and your theories *have* been wilder than usual. How can he *not* hate them, with this level of overkill and mutilation?"

"He doesn't *hate* them, I was wrong about **that**."

"And you could be wrong about this," Zeller muttered.

"I know I'm right, Jack," Will said, glaring at the technician, "I know it."

Jack, in fact all except Hannibal, seemed unconvinced. "Alright," he began, frustration leaking into his tone, and he pulled Will to one side. "Take the day. Get clear. Come back."

"I am clear Jack."

"Take the day," he said, firmly this time. Will scowled, narrowing his eyes and frustration burning beneath his skin, but nevertheless turned on his heel.

"Einar," he ordered. The wolf was on his feet in an instant, as was Perkūnas. Will hesitated, looked up to glance at Hannibal, before rolling his eyes. "We'll see you later Kūnas," he promised.

The jaguar frowned. "Okay," he replied, tone that spoke volumes of how he didn't want to be there.

Will hesitated. "Come on then," he murmured, jerking his head and the Daemon bound over to him instantly. He looked back at Hannibal. "Later," he said, waiting only for the Doctor's nod of acknowledgement, before turning away.

And with that, he left, the incriminating stares and silent judgements of his colleagues following him, and the two Daemons at his heels, all the way down the hall.

Morfran

Chapter Notes

thank you for the lovely comments everyone and thank you for sticking with the story! you are all amazing, amazing, amazing people <3

rights where they go, of course, because as much as i would love it, i don't own this amazing show!

love y'all,
-R.

By the time Will, Einar and Perkūnas had returned home, Will's anger had dimmed substantially and instead a bone weary ache had settled in its place. He was tired of it all: of the disapproval, the confusion, the frustration, all of it. Will knew that Jack had a thing about *being right*, and following his *gut*, and generally dismissing anything out there in fear of monumentally messing up. It didn't matter how often Will and Einar were right, point in a direction that was even a little bit controversial and suddenly he was outside of his mind and one leap from bounding over a cliff. It was frustrating in every sense of the word and he'd hoped that the man might avoid such a process with the Devourer, not least because the man had thus far evaded conventional techniques. Apparently Jack was true to his Daemon: dogged and unwilling to learn new tricks, even if it meant the capture of a dangerous predator.

Perkūnas, fully aware of such annoyance, had placed his head in Will's lap for the drive home. Einar lay atop of him in wolf form, occasionally snuffling at Kūnas' neck, the pair crammed into the front passenger seat awkwardly enough to be comical. The blue-eyed man found that his fingers absentmindedly scratched across Perkūnas' head and behind his ears, the warm, peaceful hum buzzing beneath his skin at the motion, before repeating the action with his own Daemon, who licked his fingers once to show his approval. It was strange to think he had even been hesitant to touch Perkūnas, especially with the satisfaction radiating off the jaguar at the motion; and after his increasingly romantic interest in Hannibal (and the man's apparent romantic interest in him), be felt considerably less guilty about it too.

The three barely parted as they walked up to the door; let out, fed and watered the dogs; before finally dropping down onto the well worn sofa in more or less the same position, a glass of whisky in Will's hand. Both Daemons seemed more than a little happy with the situation, at least if the array purrs and rumbles were anything to go by. And they just sat. Will alternated between stroking Perkūnas and Einar, fingers tracing patterns and words and symbols mindlessly into their fur, scratching at their ears and huffing with laughter as they began to doze off, tongues lolling out of their mouths just a little. And for a moment Will was free - drifting on the intoxicating sensation of being so at peace - and it was wonderful.

"I find myself unwilling to let either of you go, William," Perkūnas murmured after what could have been an hour, or could have been four. All Will knew was his dogs were lay contented on his porch, the skyline had begun to darken and his glass was empty.

"Then don't," Will replied softly, letting his fingers still for the first time. They felt stiff and heavy - probably because they'd been moving for so long - but the smooth fur was a reassuring balm.

There was a moment of silence before: "Okay then," Perkūnas said, as though that was the end of the conversation.

But something made Will hesitate for just a moment. "Kūnas," he began slowly, fingers resuming their movement. "How long have you and Hannibal been killing?"

The jaguar blinked open his bright, green eyes and shifted just enough to pin his gaze to Will. There was something there, something curious and hesitant but something overwhelmingly relieved too. He was surprised at the acceptance, clearly, but also so thankful for it, because it meant that he could *keep* them. That this, whatever this was, could carry on; it could progress to long nights and sleepy mornings and stupid fights about dirty dishes and dog hair, and which car to use when driving to work and how to wear ridiculous ties and *do-we-really-have-to-throw-another-dinner-party-love*... "A while," he breathed eventually, the words settling like stones on the air. "A while."

"Oh," Will nodded dumbly, feeling Einar tense a bit too, all appearance of sleep gone with the brave question his human had asked. "Do you *have* to, or, could you stop...? I mean, is it something you *need*?"

This time there was no hesitation. Perkūnas barely took a moment to collect himself before: "Not anymore."

Something *burned* in his chest at that. Something bright and brilliant and hopeful - because he might get to keep Hannibal, he could keep Perkūnas, a notion that he long thought he, with his strange Daemon, would never be allowed to do. In all his time, Einar and Will Graham had never had another pair to call *theirs*, but suddenly that was no longer the case. He knew he didn't need to say it, but his mouth was moving before his could stop it.

"You know we wouldn't turn on you, right? Whatever it is, Einar and I, we're *in* this now," he murmured, leaning forward to rest his forehead against the jaguar's own. There was a hitch in Perkūnas' breath - just enough to betray the level of emotion running rampant through the Daemon's veins - as he did so, and Will felt the warmth drench every cell in his body. He felt filled with sunshine.

"Oh Will," Perkūnas breathed, "you have no idea how *long* we've waited for you. It's been a lifetime. It's been more." He paused. "Hannibal, he's so *cautious* after everything, and he just. Well: 'Never seek to tell thy love'."

"***William Blake***."

The voice that spoke was sibilant, words tearing itself apart with too much sound and a slurring lisp that made the hackles on both Daemons rise in an instant. It was cold and hard and unforgiving and immediately Will lurched to his feet, turning to face the noise and trying not to let himself panic. He found himself failing considerably in the last regard, especially given his gun was upstairs, the knives all in the kitchen and the only thing remotely weaponizable was the glass in his hand. Adrenaline, feeding directly into his veins, was making him jittery and he took a steadying step backwards.

The creature came first. It was an ugly thing, for a Daemon. Twisted and hanging its head to stay as long in the shadows as it could, there was nothing comfortable about looking at it. At first Will guessed it was some sort of dog, then perhaps a coyote, but the markings on its coat and the small stature gave its species away instantly: *striped hyena*. A particularly dangerous one too if the blood matted in its fur and the half snarl it offered Perkūnas and Einar in greeting was any indication. All in all, Will was becoming slowly more and more aware that this might not be a standard home invasion. And when the man that slipped out of the shadows stepped into the light, Will knew it wasn't.

He looked like a military man: all clean, sharp lines; a close, buzz-cut that did little to hide the faint scars on his face or take away from the particularly dominant one that seemed to separate his mouth in two. He was broadly built and clearly packed with muscle. There was no chance Will would be able to fight him one on one and survive - and although his odds increased with Einar and Perkūnas both being present, the aura of *feral* radiating from the hyena was enough to turn his stomach. Piercing eyes, cleft palate, strongly built, dominating, feral Daemon; Will didn't need to be a good profiler to know he was looking at the Devourer.

Unfortunately he was a very good profiler.

And it seemed *he* knew too.

"That's not your Daemon," the man said again, nodding towards Perkūnas and taking another step into the light, allowing Will to catch a glance of the gun tucked into his waistband and the knife in his hand.

"No," Will replied, saliva turning to a thick, rancid paste in his mouth. "He belongs to my partner," he continued, thinking on his feet.

"Doctor Lecter," came the reply, igniting a desperate fear in the curly-haired man's stomach.

"You know him." His voice was pitchy and almost tearful, and he found himself reaching down to curl his fingers in Perkūnas' fur.

The man hummed in reply, eyes unwavering from Will. "I know *you*," he added. "You understand." His gaze changed then, turning to Einar who was clearly torn between shifting or avoiding attention by staying put.

"Einar," Will said worriedly, urging his Daemon closer to him and Perkūnas.

"He still shifts," the man continued as though Will's palpable concern was nothing important. "How do you make him shift?"

The question threw Will. "I...I *don't.*" That was clearly **not** what the man was expecting.

"Morfran is becoming," he said instead. "Do you see him becoming?"

The only becoming Will saw in the eyes of the hyena was him becoming completely feral. "Yes," he offered instead.

"He took their strength and made it his."

Perkūnas shifted by Will's feet, clearly preparing himself to pounce. "You merged."

"They became *part* of us," he clarified, something passionate in his eyes. "Do you *see*? Do you see how glorious it is? Do you see what he truly is?"

The conversation was spiralling and Will, if he was honest with himself, didn't have the first idea on what to say. Because the man, and his Daemon, were clearly waiting for an answer that Will didn't know. And that, *that*, was dangerous. The pause that Will took, however, was clearly the wrong answer, because his face darkened, something violent and scornful creeping into his gaze, while his brows drew together. "No, you don't," he breathed.

And that was when he lunged.

Perkūnas was immediately in the way, but was met by Morfran, who sunk his teeth into the jaguar's flank. A cry from Einar and then Will felt the hard, packed muscle of the Devourer slam him to the floor.

His head cracked back painfully, thudding on the ground and burning stars into Will's retinas. He flung his arm out, palm aiming for whatever part of the face he could reach. A sickening crunch, the gush of blood and a frankly inhuman roar had the man reeling back with a snarl. Einar ploughed into his side, pushing him away and letting Will scramble to his feet, desperately looking for something to defend himself with. He knew there was a knife somewhere - he'd used it on his lures several days previously - but his attention kept wavering, because it wasn't just him in danger. Perkūnas was holding his own, but much like the profiler, the Daemon's concern for both Einar and Will was making him vulnerable and Morfran had done damage. Einar continued forward, helping the jag box the hyena into the corner of the room, teeth flecked with blood.

A hand, fingers digging sharply into his neck and the blue-eyed profiler was slammed into the wall, his cabinet crunching and pictures falling from the walls. There was breath on his cheek, the glint of sharp teeth in the half-light. "You called me Devourer. You called me monster. I am not. I am becoming. You don't see. Because I am the Dragon, and you called me insane."

With that, he plunged the knife into Will's stomach and *tore*.

Will screamed.

Einar shifted.

One moment he was a wolf, then a full set of leopard teeth sunk themselves into the fleshy part of the hyena's side. It squealed loudly, making Will groan because even gutted and choking on his own blood, there was nothing more chilling than the cry of a dying Daemon. His attacker seemed affected too, turning on his heel and swiping at Einar, clearly catching him if the following cry was any indication.

Then:

A growl from Perkūnas.

Another, inhuman snarl and desperate footsteps on his floor.

Dogs barking.

"Will, *Will,*" Perkūnas was saying, nudging at his cheek. "He's gone," he whispered, voice ragged. "Please, Will, *stand*."

"Einar," he murmured, light headed, hand reaching out.

The leopard stumbled over, lying across his legs that were splayed awkwardly beneath him and watching the blood seep out between Will's spread fingers. "M' tired," Will muttered, clutching desperately onto the scruff of Einar's neck.

Will.

Will.

Will.

It was all just words.

Perkūnas filled his vision until blackness consumed him.

Rasa

Chapter Notes

hey hey - shorter chapter with this one, but I'll hopefully get the next one up by tomorrow so y'all won't be waiting too long to resolve my nasty-ass cliff hanger haha <3

love ya, stay awesome,
-R.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The winter Perkūnas settled was harsh and cold. It had been bleak, dove grey skyline after bleak, charcoal grey skyline, and the biting wind had dragged the snow from the nearby hills into the valley, throwing it against the walls of Castle Lecter until the stone was white as far as the eye could see. His parents had worried, of course. Even with money and resources, there was still the struggle of getting into town and buying food, but Hannibal, Perkūnas, Mischa and Rasa had thought little of it. Adult problems were adult problems after all. Entranced at the sight of endless snow drifts and an opportunity to skate on the family lake, they had run amok. Winter was always a child's favourite season and that year was the winter of all winters. So they slipped out, bundled in coats, and ran through deep snow, made angels in their garden, and ignored their father, who told Hannibal almost everyday that it was irresponsible to take Mischa out in the cold.

And everyday Hannibal ignored him.

He thought maybe he did so because he was brave. Bold and brave and brash and bound to a Daemon in the shape of a lion. In reality it was because he couldn't say no to the wide, pleading gaze of his beautiful baby sister. A sister who loved to skate, smile and catch snowflakes. A sister who thought the men who came up their driveway might want to play. Visitors with friendly offerings or acquaintances of their parents - not cruel, vile people who couldn't even blame desperation: they were the only ones there after all, despite a starving village waiting only four miles away.

Perkūnas had clawed at the chains holding them until his paws bled and his gums were flayed and ragged. When Rasa began to scream, though, he'd stopped, frozen with panic, and watched as the Daemon contorted in on herself before slumping, still. Then Hannibal began to sob: great, heaving, desperate sobs that racked his chest and made his bones ache from more than just the cold. And as he watched Rasa crumble into nothing more than Dust, he felt his heart shatter into piercing glass shards that stabbed at the inside of his ribs and made him feel fragile. Because Mischa was dead. Mischa was dead and it was Hannibal's fault.

And Perkūnas settled.

He settled in *Rasa's* form.

Hannibal didn't remember being rescued, or even saving himself. In fact, there was very little of the following years that he could recall, other than his home was gone, his family dead and his soul was an open, gaping wound, constantly reminding him that he hadn't managed to save his sister. At first, rescuers used words like 'normal' and 'trauma' and other labels to try and quantify the extent of his grief and why he didn't speak. They were all idiots in his eyes, playing with concepts that could never understand. Later they'd try and *make* him speak. Encouragements turned to prompts turned to gruff demands and the other orphans chimed in regularly with enough cruel comments to twist his insides. Perkūnas tried to speak to him, but Hannibal cut him off every time. Why would he ever wish to hear the words of such a thing? Eventually he fell silent too, withering away until emaciated and frail, but just feral enough to prove that he was far from weak. The pair skulked together in the bones of their ancestral home until their uncle, like a knight atop a horse, came charging in to see what was left of his brother's estate - and his brother's family.

And then Paris and Florence and Paris again.

And vengeance.

And the slick of blood between his fingers, the smell of fear and the taste of copper on his tongue. Flesh between his teeth and up to the wrist in organs, he split his time between learning how to fix the body and learning how to take it apart. He spoke of course, but Perkūnas didn't. They called him conservative. Hannibal didn't care as long as the thing that walked beside him, now a fully grown mockery of the jaguar cub Rasa had almost always been, killed when he told it to and understood how its presence was unwanted. Even his aunt, a regal woman who was obvious in her interest, couldn't quite stomach Perkūnas. Although the dangerous glint in his eye and the unwillingness to conform no doubt worsened her opinion. It was only when she spotted Perkūnas wandering alone in the streets, Hannibal still at home, that it came to light at just how disconnected from his soul Hannibal truly was.

They argued for three hours.

She said it was unnatural. He, using voice as a weapon now, told her that it was his business.

It was the last time she touched him. And while he missed the affection, and the sex, Hannibal found himself relieved to be free of his aunt, especially when his attentions turned to America, and the last on his list. The last who fell gracelessly and spluttering out apologies he thought might save himself, as though pleading saved Hannibal's family. When his chest spasmed and the rattle in his lungs stopped, Perkūnas - still too thin and still too unhinged - had rasped: "Will you speak to me now?"

They got better, after. It was survival at first. Hannibal knew, deep down, that he couldn't neglect his Daemon too much, else they'd *both* go mad. It started with a word here and there, but both knew there was no way of bridging the chasm that had opened up between them: too much damage had been done. So Perkūnas wandered. Like a shadow at night, he disappeared, black fur melting into the background. While others smiled through the confusion of barely seeing his jaguar, some, like Bedelia and her fox Daemon Mara, understood the *danger* that such independence meant. Especially when the distance grew and the effect on Hannibal

lessened. He was separate, *other*, an entity unyielding to something as human and *base* as a soul. Perkūnas, a mere shadow on the fringes of his existence.

Then came ***them***.

Will Graham was beautiful.

He didn't know it, clearly, if the way he hid behind awful plaid shirts and thick, heavy framed glasses was any indication. His curls and aloofness, a defence for those untalented or unwilling to clamber over the forts he'd erected so heartily. And Hannibal was desperate to do just that: to climb, to *demolish* the forts that Will used to keep people away. Hannibal wanted to watch as he lingered on the edges of a room, aware and ready to run at the first sign of trouble, and soothe him. He wanted to *own* Will's bravery, because he was brave, of that there was no doubt; but only when it came to monsters - everything else made him fearful or angry, ready to turn like a scared dog on its owner. No one would have believed that all three forms of Will's Daemon were predators. Successful, *dangerous* predators, too. And there was another beautiful thing about Will Graham: his soul.

Einar was one of a kind and while plagued with demons that Hannibal couldn't quite figure out, he was more attuned to his human than any Daemon the doctor had seen before. The profiler only need glance at a case, his mind skimming the mere surface of a killer, and Einar would shed fur or feathers and scales would layer his body. It was memorising, and jealousy inducing, and Hannibal had longed for Perkūnas to understand him in such away and shed the skin of his dead sister's Daemon for years.

But Perkūnas didn't. Instead the jaguar crawled into Will Graham's life and slowly began encroaching on Hannibal's, dragging himself back into the world he'd fashioned around him. He was hateful of that at first: especially the first time the faint, ghostly twinge in his abdomen cut through him like a knife, a sign that maybe his Daemon was just a little too far away. He'd not felt that in years. And although Wolf Trap was far, Hannibal wasn't foolish enough to believe it was the distance, and not the sudden emergence of someone who made his soul, and what little heart he had left, *burn* inside him, that caused the flair of *feeling*. Then Will had asked for a chance.

A chance with him.

At first he thought it strange, perhaps a lure from a fisherman who could see behind the mask, but the way he had spoken about Alana, and the possession he felt over his Daemon, Hannibal knew it was genuine. In a way, he'd wondered *why* someone might find themselves defensive of the jaguar, especially someone like Will: with his dark, wonderful way of peering through the cracks on the surface of the world. But even his confusion couldn't stop the smug pride radiating through his core and settling in his chest like a pleasant meal, or a particularly satisfying kill might do. Will wanted a part of him - the part Hannibal hated the most - and wanted the rest. He'd barely hesitated in his answer, letting his emotions bleed through his smile.

It was later that evening that he set down his knife and fork, pushed back his chair, poured a large glass of wine, and began to talk. At first he just spoke *at* Perkūnas. Vague banalities that didn't mean anything, gossip from his social circle and the prospect of a new chairman on the

board at the Opera. Hearsay and nothingness. For three hours, his mouth moved and his Daemon didn't. The jaguar pinned his glossy green gaze on his human and simply listened. By hour four, he was contributing. It started with a joke about a patient, then a muttered annoyance about the Daemon of a fellow arts patron - eventually it led to them chuckling quietly amongst themselves, content in each others company for the first time in years. Hannibal felt better afterwards: more grounded, less inclined to rage or drift aimlessly, trapped in the person-suit he'd so rigidly formed around him through years of secret smiles and sophistication. Perkūnas, quiet and aware that pushing for more would only injure progress, fell silent when Hannibal finally did, letting the man retreat into himself.

The jaguar almost choked on his tongue when Hannibal greeted him with a curt: "Good morning," the next day, something in his gaze that was far from accepting but closer to a truce than they'd had in a very, very long time.

By the time coffee happened, they'd managed to talk on several occasions, and Hannibal was becoming increasingly aware of just *where* his Daemon was in a room - and who held his attention. The persistent drift of his gaze to Einar and Will, checking for injuries, watching for any threats was endearing, yes, but a beacon at just how invested Perkūnas already was. His soul, without his knowledge, seemed to have picked the person for them. It took very little time for Hannibal to agree, though, because even hesitant and racked with first-date nerves, Hannibal could see how much more there was to the man before him and how, potentially, the Doctor could share not only his home with Will, but his hobby as well. It was a tantalising prospect that was barely marred by the gravity of wanting to share his life with the man.

Every part of his life.

So he grew used to the growing warmth pooling in his stomach that told him his connection to Perkūnas, despite his best intentions, was flaring to life once more. He accepted that perhaps, in this one occasion, his Daemon might have been right, and might have been braver than he by pursing Will and Einar. Yes, he had defied all of Hannibal's plans, intentions and strict practices for engaging with new people, but he was *right.*

He was right.

Right up until he was wrong.

Because nothing in the world could have prepared him for the pain. One moment he'd stood in his kitchen, speaking politely with Alana (having invited her for a late, light lunch after their admittedly disastrous consultation with Jack) and the next it felt like every organ in his body had been dipped in acid. The bowl, holding the salad he'd been tossing, fell to the floor with a *smash* and lettuce littered the ground like confetti. Alana was shouting, running to him in an instant, her mouth shaping his name over and over again. But there was only pain. A blinding, mind-numbing pain. He felt turned inside out and left out to dry in the hot sun.

His only thought was of Will. The pain, it had to be about Will. About his darling Will.

And Einar.

And Perkūnas.

"Will," he nearly screamed, knuckles white and eyes rolling into his skull. "Find...it's...Help *Will,* Alana...Will..."

Then everything went black.

Chapter End Notes

Had yet more diversions from the canon of HDM so sorry for those guys wanting more loyalty to the dust/Daemon/dimensions lol haha :)

Also just a touch of Hannibal Rising in this, and an allude to Hannibal/Lady Murasaki because we all know they were doing the do, even tho that's creepy af, cos dude, she do the do with ya uncle too. #poet

Enjoy,
-R.

Einar

Chapter Notes

As promised (albeit a little later than promised)

rights where they go, love you all, etc. etc. etc.,

-R.

To say that everything hurt would be an understatement. In fact, it was so far from the truth, it might have been the sun from the earth. Will felt as though he'd been cleaved down to his bones and opened up for the world to see. Every atom in his body ached with a radiating intensity that made him want to bite his tongue save he groan too loud. It was all pain.

There were two distinct weights on him when he finally let his eyes flutter open. Perkūnas, across his legs, and Einar, draped over his heavily bandaged chest, and both were sporting their own set of wrappings. It took the profiler a moment, however, to notice that his Daemon was in leopard form despite being in company.

It took him even longer to realise that he wasn't the only one in the room.

Propped up in a chair by his side and looking more than just a little worse for wear was Hannibal. From the blanket draped over him and the rumpled state of his clothes, as well as the bag shoved just out of sight, he'd been there for a while, and sleeping for a few hours. His head, propped up on his hand, was relaxed and open for perhaps the first time. His eyes fluttered just a little, movements beneath his skin - sharp and darting - spoke of a dream that Will was reluctant to disturb. He'd managed to gain some stubble too - enough to betray that it hadn't been mere hours since he was attacked by the Daemon Devourer.

He shifted his weight a little and instantly Perkūnas was awake, eyes fixed on him. "Hey," Will rasped, uncurling his fingers and reaching out towards the jag instinctively. He whined quietly and snuffled closer, seeking comfort and reassurance, it was clear. The curly-haired man wasn't sure if it was his imagination, the lethargy still lingering like smoke around him, or his still adjusting eyes, but the Daemon seemed a little thinner too.

"William," Perkūnas murmured, sounding only an instant from tears. He edged up the bed as carefully as he could until he was flush with Einar and able to press his forehead to Will awkwardly. There was a pause before: "That was very unpleasant to experience, William," he muttered, "please do not make me endure that again."

The profiler couldn't help but laugh at that. A rough, gravelly scratch that sounded more like he was coughing up a fur-ball than anything, and it was enough to rouse Einar too. The

leopard stretched and turned to his human with a smile that spoke volumes as to his considerable fatigue, annoyance and relief.

"You suck," he declared to Will bluntly, causing the mother-of-all double takes from Perkūnas, whose eyes widened so far they practically eclipsed his face.

"You *speak*," Kūnas choked.

"Of course I speak, *moron*," he shot back before softening slightly and nudging the jaguar with his head in reassurance, "but why do I need to when you speak enough for the both of us?"

"You're speaking to me," Perkūnas parroted, as though it was something significant.

"The first and only Daemon he has talked to, too," Will added, voice croaky, enjoying the bewildered awe that had taken residence on the big cat's features.

"You're lying," came the response, all disbelief and no heat.

"And he wonders why I kept quiet, with insults like that?" Einar laughed, licking the side of Perkūnas' face and grinning widely at the sheer incredulity. "Besides, it was much more fun watching you chase your own tail trying to suss me out, don't you think?"

"You were *testing* me?"

"Testing, enjoying the show, waiting for a full house; that all sounds rather distasteful, don't you think? I prefer to say that I erred on the side of caution, don't you agree Will?"

The profiler nodded.

"And the form?" Perkūnas pressed, now apparently determined to uncover just how much he actually knew about the Daemon lay beside him.

"Please," Einar snorted, "I'm pretty sure you stole it from *me*," he said, chin in the air. "I've been a leopard my entire life."

"...You're joking."

"If we're going to spend the rest of our lives together, Perkūnas, then the bar you've set for disbelief needs to be raised much higher, otherwise you'll be wandering around like a bewildered cat that just managed to lose a fight to a mouse."

"Well I very well may have done, especially if you have another form I'm not aware of," the jaguar shot back.

"Oh don't be such a drama queen," Einar replied, doing his damnedest to not only roll his eyes, but his entire head too.

"You'll quickly wish he'd shut back up again," Will chimed in, a hand each now settling on the heads of the two Daemons and embedding his fingers into the remarkably similar fur. A

purr struck up in the room within a moment, echoing off the walls and making something unfurl in Will's stomach, banishing almost every ounce of pain still radiating through his body. It was like sun to snow, leaving nothing but chilled water and the faint reminders of what was, behind. A huff and a shift from his left told him that they weren't the only ones impacted by the sudden sense of peace and contentment filling their veins.

It took a few moments for the Doctor to gather his bearings and reorient his gaze back to Will, and another few seconds to really register what he was seeing, and then his mouth dropped open and he lurched forward. "*Will*," he gasped, "you're awake."

The blue-eyed man nodded, offering a tired smile. "You look awful," he murmured, "are you alright?"

"Fine, fine," the European dismissed, coming to hover at the edge of the bed. "How are you feeling?"

"Like I've just found the world's best pain relief," he chuckled, nodding down to Perkūnas who was looking at Hannibal almost daringly. And by the sudden resolve that had entered the older man's gaze, he not only intended to meet the challenge, but also supersede it too.

"The Devourer -"

"No offence Hannibal," Will cut him off, "but I really don't want to talk about him right now. I'll catch him, but right now, I'd like to sit quietly and just enjoy not feeling like I got gutted."

"Of course," he nodded, taking a step back.

"With you here, *obviously*," Will added before the man could get too far away. He jerked his head back to the chair and urged him to bring it closer.

"Of course," Hannibal said again. He moved sluggishly, as though in pain himself and Will frowned.

"Come here," he ordered, taking his hand off Einar to reach for the Doctor. Immediately Hannibal replied, interlinking their fingers. His pulse jumped when Will began to guide his hand to the top of Einar's head and there was not just hesitation but resistance too.

"*Will* -"

"I won't bite," Einar snorted, clearly amused by the whole thing.

Hannibal's jaw dropped. "Yeah," Perkūnas interrupted drily, ignoring the cackling from the leopard, "he does that too."

Admittedly, Will was impressed in the speed in which Hannibal recovered his composure, mask slipping back into place with resounding smoothness as though it had never been absent. Instead, he nodded once, tightly, before letting Will place their joined hands on Einar.

When Will was little, his father used to talk about *knowing*. About having another pair that completed you in a way that couldn't be described. About a single touch, if you were brave

enough, that would answer the questions of the universe and bind you for all eternity to the someone who you truly could not live without. At first, Will was bewitched by the notion; as he grew however, it became little more than a fairy-tale, locked away with Father Christmas and the Easter Bunny, something that is told to children so they see the wonder in the world, rather than the horror. The moment that Hannibal and Einar touched, however, wedged between he and Perkūnas, he felt like digging up his old man just so he could tell him he was right after all.

The room itself seemed to glow a brilliant, bright gold, that touched every tile, every corner and every beeping machine. His pain was gone, as had all anxieties or concerns about Hannibal and his reactions and his hobbies and his health, because he knew everything would be fine. There was a conglomeration of colours: pink-ish red hues blurring into soothing blues with soft lines; and a sense of overarching unity, despite everything suddenly feeling like it was high definition. It felt like the world had just adjusted the quality from 240p to 1080p on the YouTube video that was their life.

A visible shudder went through the Lithuanian, hand reaching out instinctively to clutch at Perkūnas as though for balance. He looked as wrecked as Will had the first time he'd touched the jaguar, perhaps even more so. He was sure about one thing: had the man not been sat, he'd have been on the floor. It was quite satisfying to see the Doctor so open, and incredibly humbling too, especially when translucent tears began to track their way down his features. Will was moving before his even registered it, thumb gently catch the milky beads and wiping them clear. Hannibal met his gaze then, hand releasing Perkūnas to hold Will's palm against his cheek, as though frightened that he'd never feel such a thing again should the man let go.

After what could have been an hour, or could have been a year, he smiled. "So this is what happy feels like," he breathed, eyes adoring. Will felt his cheeks heat in a violent blush.

"What a smooth talking bastard," Einar snorted, causing Perkūnas to start laughing and Hannibal to turn to the leopard with a glare. "*What*?" he asked, grinning and the picture of innocence.

"Shut it," Will ordered.

They huffed out a laugh at the leopard's expense, but it was interrupted by a faint knock at the door. "If that is that fucking duck again, I'm going to pull out all of it's feathers," Einar scowled, moving closer and practically curling up on Will's lap, disturbing all of them in the process and nearly pushing Perkūnas out of the way.

"Duck?" Hannibal asked, adorably confused.

"Cecilia," Kūnas answered for him, before turning to Will for confirmation, who only nodded in agreement.

Sure enough, when the door creaked open, it was to the sight of Alana and, unsurprisingly, Cecilia too. The swan wandered in first, looking just as regal as ever, her human behind her, and both were regarding the two Daemons on the bed warily. At first Will was confused, then he realised all at once that neither of them could tell Einar and Perkūnas apart. The Daemon

who had been so desperate to get close to Perkūnas couldn't even distinguish him from a similar looking soul-form. Will almost laughed.

"Will," Alana greeted, relief and something else in her voice he couldn't place. "You're awake, finally!"

"Just about," he returned amiably. "I take it I was out a while?"

"Six days," Hannibal answered for him.

"We were so worried," she continued, edging closer.

Will smiled thinly before a piece of the puzzle that hadn't quite *fit* leapt out at him. "Wait, how'd you find me?"

Alana's smile turned just a little bit brittle at the question. "Hannibal," she answered. "He knew you were in trouble. Told me to call for help."

The curly-haired whirled on the Doctor, who grimaced. "I felt the pain," he said, "from Perkūnas. Acute Soul-Separation," he continued, "it was considerably unpleasant." Will frowned, sensing more to the story, but knowing that it was a conversation for when they were no longer in public.

"Huh," he said instead, swallowing the questions. "Thanks."

Alana shifted slightly, clearly unfamiliar with lingering on the edge, playing third wheel. "The others have been visiting, of course, and your dogs are fine," she added. "Of course Jack wants a statement. Hannibal thought it might be the Devourer -"

"It was," Will retorted, irritation bleeding into his veins, "and he's trying to make his Daemon shift." The silent *I-was-right* ringing loud and unabashed in the silence. "Although he'd probably prefer to be called something other than Devourer."

Silence.

"Oh, okay," Alana replied, unsure as to what to ask next, although her eyes betrayed her question, as did the deliberate staring between Cecilia and both Perkūnas and Einar. "He's shifted again," she finally got out, jerking her head towards Perkūnas who smirked in amusement at her mistake.

"No," Will shook his head, "he's always been a leopard."

"Isn't he a jaguar?"

"No, Perkūnas is a jaguar," he corrected, "but Einar is a leopard." A pause. "They're both panthers, though. Different species," he turned to Hannibal, feeling both incredibly brave and suddenly desperate to lay all his cards on the table, "but they're same family, have the same instincts, built on the same basic building blocks."

Understanding bloomed in his eyes. A single look at Perkūnas and his suspicion was confirmed. "Same hunting instinct."

"Similar," Will confessed, "they don't have the same appetites, or ways of going about it, but I'm pretty sure there's a certain overlap."

A smile, then: "Isn't that just wonderful to know, darling."

Andrea

Chapter Notes

sorry for the crazy long delay, it has been a hectic month (two? more? a bit?), which included the highlights of me breaking ribs, bruising a kidney, getting a sinus infection and having a week long migraine. so, black and blue as I may be, I am back (although I cannot promise speedy speedy updates but I'll do my very very best)!

i hope everyone is good and healthy and happy and enjoying life!

rights where they go of course,
love you, always,
-R.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

To say that Will was never good at just lounging around would have been more than just an understatement. In his own defence, his mind could never let him relax enough, neither would his dogs, to simply skulk around doing nothing; although somehow he managed more than a week of being a semi acceptable patient before he began to plan his escape.

He'd been ready to leave four days before the doctors finally deemed him well enough to go home. The over-smiley nurse who had initially tried her luck with Hannibal (until Einar growled lowly and Perkūnas took it upon himself to express just where their affections truly lay) had informed him with a forced smile that held too many teeth, that he was being discharged that afternoon. She added, with a quick glance at Hannibal, that there could be no stress placed on him - physically or mentally - for the next couple of weeks. Will had grinned ferociously, turned to the European with a glint in his eyes and said: "Well, there goes the sex marathon," enjoying the bright, burning red that flushed Hannibal's cheeks and the awkward splutter from the nurse, who's hopes were now thoroughly and undeniably dashed. She'd retreated quickly, leaving a thick packet of paper containing all the information he'd need about caring for his wound, and a bag brimming with medications he'd have to take. Hannibal, much to Will's amusement, had put them both in his bag with an expression that expressed just *who* would be caring for Will's injuries and what he thought of the apparent mistrust in his abilities as a doctor. Perkūnas and Einar both laughed at him.

The two Daemon's had, unsurprisingly, not moved from each other's side. Draped over one another, pressed flank to flank, or passing time grooming each other, the pair looked every inch a long mated couple. Even the medical staff, versed in all manner of Daemon forms, couldn't hide their curiosity, nor their only slightly unwelcome chorus of *'awws'*, at the melanistic jaguar and leopard that fit so well together. Probably because while soul forms tended to be similar in compatible pairs, seeing two big cats, that to the untrained eye were

virtually indistinguishable, lounge around and play like domestic kittens was highly unusual. And highly entertaining.

Hannibal, meanwhile, even with his apparent breakthrough and Will's awkward hint at *knowing*, had still not understood that spending time with his Daemon was a good thing, and had returned to awkwardly lingering on the edges only growing bold enough to encroach into Will's space and pander to his every whim, or dropping kisses on his hands, face and head as though to reassure himself the profiler was there and well. Perkūnas hadn't tried to rectify this imposed distance though, instead also focusing on Einar and Will, but the black leopard had taken it upon himself to frequently jump up onto Hannibal's lap and push his head into the Doctor's neck, before bounding away once more. After each time the Lithuanian looked winded, as though the contact had made him drunk. Will didn't doubt that such a feeling was *exactly* how he felt, given that he himself still experience such dizzying warmth at Perkūnas' touch. He laughed the first few times, then began dropping kisses of his own, the two growing closer and closer as they spent every waking moment together and craved each other's presence like never before.

And Will wasn't dense enough to deny that the warmth in his chest whenever Hannibal looked at him was just giddiness, lust and embarrassment rolled into one.

The afternoon was cold - too cold to be comfortable - when he was finally wheeled outside. He'd stubbornly denied Hannibal's insistence that he wear more layers and instantly regretted it the moment the automatic doors of the hospital *whooshed* open, letting a gust of what was more like ice than air sweep over him. But, rather than look lovingly up at his other half and ask for a blanket, Will grit his teeth and ignored the smug and amused looks that Perkūnas and Einar were shooting him before bounding away like children finally allowed back onto a jungle-gym after breaking their arm. They revelled in the freedom in a way that Will longed to do.

A way that he *still* had to wait for.

Because, despite being under Hannibal's care and technically well enough to fend for himself, the guilt-brigade consisting of Alana, Jack and the techs had all taken it upon themselves to invade him home and cook him a welcome home meal; as though Will - anti-people, anti-social interaction Will - would appreciate the invasion on his first evening free of antiseptic, lino and lime green walls. His only amusement was that Hannibal seemed to share his sentiments (but was too polite to do anything about it). The only upside was Bella Crawford and her Tasmanian Devil Daemon Andrea, who was in stark contrast to her husband and often Will's saving grace in events that Jack dragged him to. Bella and Andrea often sat to one side and gossiped with him about things she'd heard when Jack wasn't watching his loose lips closely enough and they had giggled like school children at their last black-tie, monkey-suit show. Will liked the pair for their personality and humour, of course, but also because he never felt patronised nor studied when in their presence. Andrea was also one of the only Daemons who would talk to Einar (well, talk at him), and often read his responses in the shift of his wings or the way he rolled his eyes. She was very clever...not to mention she kept Jack in line. It would probably be nice to see her again, regardless of the nature of such a meeting.

By the time the two Daemons had snuggled together in the back and Will had clambered into the front seat of the Bentley, Hannibal had shaken hands with the nurses, traded yet more paperwork, slid into the driver's seat, started the car and was waiting to go and, with a nod from Will, cruised out of the car park.

"About time," Einar muttered from the back, casting a dirty look at the hospital out the back window. "I thought we'd never leave."

"Well how about focusing on never going back?" Perkūnas hummed, absentmindedly grooming the side of Einar's face.

"You're only saying that because watching strangers poke and prod at us instead of yourselves was difficult," Einar snorted in reply, sending a weighted glance over at Hannibal who was trying not to react to the accusation.

Kūnas looked at his human before humming noncommittally. "We reserve the right to silence," he finally replied, drawing a laugh from Will who reached back to scratch behind his ears before withdrawing his hand and moving to tangle his fingers in Hannibal's. The man's eyes widened before he settled again and dropped a kiss on the profiler's palm.

"The Daemon Devourer," Will began tentatively. "We all know he's going to try again. He can't leave loose ends, especially ones that can identify him *and* have a shot at getting in his head." The blue eyed man paused for a second. "So I'd like to know what the plan is..."

There was a resounding silence in which it quickly became obvious Hannibal wasn't *quite* sure what to say.

"Jack and the FBI -"

"Hannibal, you and I *both* know that Jack doesn't know his arse from his elbow and the Devourer is going to run all over him. Not to mention that I'd stake my life on you going after him yourself, which I would really rather you didn't do without a plan, or back-up."

"Will-"

"They *know* Hannibal," Perkūnas jumped in. "They know and they don't care."

"We've kinda known for a while actually," Einar added, unruffled. "It was kind of obvious as you two *reek* of blood." He glanced quickly at Will. "I thought we covered this...?"

"Hannibal has difficulty with believing in the best in people," Kūnas muttered back.

"*Don't* talk about me as though I am not present in this conversation *Perkūnas*," Hannibal snapped, muscles tensed.

"Hey," Will shot back instantly, squeezing hard on the hand he still held, "don't snap at him. He's done *nothing* wrong."

The European turned sharply. "He's being **rude**," Hannibal hissed.

Will's eyes narrowed. "No, he's not," he began, gearing up for a fight, when he spotted something. Barely a flicker beneath the mask Hannibal wore so tightly but it was enough to not just make him pause, but to deflate his anger altogether.

Will softened then and took a deep breath. "Pull the car over, Han," he said gently. "Pull over now please."

They screeched rather ungracefully to a halt at the side of the road, the Doctor's gaze remaining stubbornly forward and ignoring the angry pips of the horn from the pick-up that had been following them. Luckily they'd managed to make it on to the less busy side streets as they made their way back to Wolf Trap.

"Look at me please," Will murmured, rubbing his thumb across the back of Hannibal's hand.

It took another few long seconds but he complied. Will reached forward gently with his free hand, resting on his cheek as though to ground him, then he began to speak.

"Einar and I, we're not going anywhere, okay? We're not going to leave you, or betray you, or turn you in. We made our choice a while back and we chose to be happy rather than morally right. So we're in this, okay. But we're here with ***both*** of you." He glanced over at pinned Perkūnas down. "You are just as important to us as Hannibal is, okay Kūnas? And I know you two have a rocky history, and we're going to work on that, *through* that, but while we will respect that things haven't been great for you two, we aren't going to let you tear each other apart, okay?" Will looked back at Hannibal. "You and Perkūnas are a team. You both saved us. And that connection that's been getting stronger, and let you know that I was in trouble? That saved us. You both did. And you are both amazing, beautiful creatures and Einar and I want to spend as much time with you as we can. Us knowing what we know, or learning more, isn't going to change that. Because even though this is new and scary and moving at a pace that is frankly ridiculous, I think it's our expectation of what everyone else will think that's stopping us from admitting to each other that this is probably *it* for both of us." He paused. "Am I wrong?"

Hannibal shook his head numbly.

"You don't have to say anything, or do anything, but I'd like you to listen when I say this, because it's important. You are human. You are human and have all the human flaws and emotions and feelings as the rest of us. And that's good. That's amazing. And Perkūnas is the beautiful embodiment of that humanity: of the humanity still in you Hannibal. And Einar and I want it, we want all of it. We can't promise we have the same appetites as you both but, as you can see," he jerked his head, "we're the same family of beast. And whatever happened in the past, you'll tell us when you want to, *if* you want to. But I feel like you're still punishing each other, and that isn't helping either of you. I also know that it probably wasn't your fault Han, and it wasn't Perkūnas' either. But even if it was, you have to forgive yourself; ***all*** parts of you, otherwise what we have between us doesn't matter because you'll destroy yourself long before we can make this thing a *thing*. So we'll make a deal, alright? *Quid pro quo,* Dr Lecter. When this is all over and the Devourer isn't a threat, I promise I'll be less anti-people and Einar and I will do social things like go to the opera and dinner parties, and we'll only complain about it a little. If you want us to of course. But you and Perkūnas have to promise to be kinder to each other and to do the quiet things too, like talk about what happened or

anything you want, to let your barriers fall down once in a while, or lie on the grass and watch the stars. Little things, yeah?" He stopped, talking in a breath. "Okay?" he asked, glancing first at the man and then at the jaguar. "Yes?"

There was a long, pregnant silence, before: "Yes," Hannibal croaked, voice sounding as though he'd been screaming for hours rather than sitting in silence.

Will was a touch concerned until Perkūnas piped up from behind him. "It's been a while since someone cared enough to fix us," he explained, voice a little wobbly and eyes a little shiny. Will's heart swelled in his chest at the sentiment.

Then his Daemon went and ruined the moment.

"You don't need *fixing*," Einar replied, "you two just need some TLC and a kick up the ass." He paused. "Not necessarily in that order."

And then they were laughing. Stupid, loud, obnoxious laughing until they'd practically steamed up the Bentley's windows and their stomachs ached (Will's more than the others, he was sure).

"Okay, darling Will," Hannibal finally said, a smile in his tone. "I cannot promise you it will be easy, nor can I promise that I'll do everything well, but I can promise that, with your help of course, I'll...I'll try." Will beamed at him and rewarded him with a kiss, which the man quickly deepened, much to the amusement of the Daemons in the back. When they finally pulled apart, foreheads rested against one another, Hannibal took a breath and spoke again:

"I will hunt the Devourer down because he hurt you," he began. "And I plan to cut out his lungs and watch him try to breath without them. I plan to watch his Daemon turn to dust and know that he can never hurt you again, because you're mine, and he hurt what is mine, and I want to kill him."

A silence, then. "Okay," Will murmured. "But not yet."

"Will -"

"You're angry, tired, over emotional; that'll lead to mistake. Let us heal, let us get stronger, then we can help." Something unsure flickered in the Doctor's gaze. "Same family remember?" he reminded.

"Family," Hannibal echoed, looking at Perkūnas strangely, something swimming in his eyes.

"It's time, don't you think?" the jaguar asked. "Besides," he added from his place entwined with Einar, eyes flickering over to Will. "Really, they already are."

Chapter End Notes

sorry for any typos or mistakes! i tend to be pretty rubbish at editing, but i'll keep an eye out for any i missed :)
-R.

Mara

Chapter Notes

thank you so much for the love (and the get wells), you're all amazing; i'm all good and doing well and i'm well enough (or stupid enough) to still be going with ma marathon training so don't ya'll worry about little old (idiot) me haha :)

rights where they go of course,

this chapter's a little meanie, but lol, my brain is a bitch apparently haha :)

love ya all,
-R.

It had been six days since his return home and Hannibal had not left his side. The party - as Will had expected - had been nothing short of awkward and even Bella apologised to him on her husband's behalf. Will waved her away of course, insisting it was fine, but shot Jack a look that expressed his irritation at the man's cowardice.

Andrea had immediately noted the closeness of Einar and Perkūnas, and probably would have done even without Jack having mentioned something previously. She smiled gently and remarked at what a lovely couple they made. The two grinned (Perkūnas almost shyly and Einar with the largest, smuggest expression he could possibly make) before bounding off together to another room, as though there was a need to demonstrate just how couple-like they were. Interestingly though no one else made any mention of the pair, even with Will and Hannibal holding hands for most of the gathering and sharing loaded glances every few moments. Only Bella, Andrea, Bev and Mallory made any comment on Einar's form: the others, no doubt aware via Alana, chose to ignore, or avoid, the subject. Bev had rolled her eyes and said something about compatibility in a voice so heavily laced with innuendo, even the nearly unflappable Hannibal blushed crimson. Throughout the four hours of painful, stilted conversation and avoiding a zoo full of elephants that lingered about the room, they all finally left, wishing him well and telling him they'd catch the Devourer for him.

Will nearly bit his tongue off to keep the snide *"no you won't"* from rolling off his lips; because if Hannibal had his way, they'd be cleaning up the killer with a mop.

Einar, glad to see the back of the guests, stretched out and watched the taillights from Alana's car disappear into the dark before announcing that as they were now at one with their murderous tendencies, could he *please, pretty please,* take his claws to Cecilia's neck.

Perkūnas laughed, headbutted the leopard, and dragged him over to the pile of blankets thrown in the corner for them and they spent the rest of the evening muttering amongst

themselves.

"It seems our souls are conspiring without us," Hannibal murmured from his place over Will's shoulder.

The profiler laughed. "Weren't they always?" he asked, pressing a fleeting kiss to the underside of the man's jaw before wandering up to his bed and falling face down into it, groaning softly in both pain and general relief. After taking it upon himself to tidy up, sort out the dogs and lock up, Hannibal finally joined him, pulling him into his body and supporting the aching parts of him. Will hummed in thanks then snorted when Perkūnas and Einar, having followed Hannibal upstairs, jumped up on the foot of the bed and lay across their feet.

And so their self-imposed solitude began.

And Hannibal puttered about Will's kitchen in soft-knit jumpers and the closest thing to slouch-pants he owned, content to ignore his patients, Baltimore's high-society and all other responsibilities that were not Will, Einar and, true to his word, Perkūnas. The two had a long way to go, but they exchanged more words in the week since the hospital than Will believed they had in over a decade.

Will practically burst with pride, frequently dropping kisses on Hannibal's cheeks, or folding them both into lingering hugs as a reward. Einar continued as normal, grooming Perkūnas regularly, sleeping on him always and tugging on his ear when he was "being annoying" or "impressively boring". All in all it was a domesticity that neither the profiler, nor the killer, really saw coming - even when their souls decided to play matchmaker - but they both found themselves enjoying it immensely; particularly the long, winding walks around Will's property, bundled up in a hundred layers, surrounded by dogs and pressed closely into one another.

And then shit hit the fan.

Hannibal, realising that their cupboards were dangerously empty, had taken it upon himself to drive into town for groceries, stopping at his place first to grab more clothes and anything else he might want or need. It meant leaving Will alone in Wolf Trap for the first time. While Will wasn't exactly frightened - he *had* refused police protection after all, and with his gun a lot more handy and his Daemon a lot more aware, and his morals a little bit more grey, he was ready for the Devourer should he come - Will found himself almost hollow. He'd taken for granted just how big a gap Hannibal filled with his presence until it wasn't there.

However, within thirty minutes of him slipping out the door, Perkūnas in tow, grumbling about the inconvenience of their new found understanding (especially when they couldn't sustain the Baltimore-Wolf Trap distance without injuring each other anymore), a car pulled up on his driveway.

The woman who got out was elegant, but cold. All sharp angles that reminder Will of glass. She had a brittle smile and knives in her eyes and she made Will a little uncomfortable - not because she could see through him, but because she was a different type of creature and he wasn't sure he liked it. Her Daemon, a small fox with bright orange fur trotted alongside her

with confidence that felt a touch forced. She'd seen things and they'd changed her - a survivor, but one who, ultimately, didn't know enough to stay long in the game without being burnt.

Although she could see Will through the screen door, she still knocked, waiting patiently for him to hobble forward and nudge it open with his foot, Einar lurking by his side. At the sight of him, her eyes went comically wide before something flickered there, an understanding almost.

"Ah," she said with a smile, tilting her head, "I fear my journey may have been wasted."

Will frowned but stepped outside. His dogs followed after him and despite several lurching forward towards the Daemon, it didn't move at all, and Will sent them away. "Wanna sit?" he said, gaze narrowed as he jerked his head to the bench seats on the porch.

"Thank you," she replied, perching stiffly on the wood, her fox jumping up and settling alongside her. "I am Dr Bedelia Du Maurier," she began with a tone that suggest Will should know who she was. At his shrug, she sighed. "I am Hannibal Lecter's psychiatrist."

Immediately Einar's ears pricked forwards. "Right," Will muttered slowly, "and what are you doing here Dr Du Maurier?"

There was a conflicted look on her face then before resolve sharpened her features. "I saw a news article about an agent attacked in his home," she started, blue eyes icy and determined. "And in it I saw reference to Hannibal. Hannibal does not often seek attention as himself," she muttered cryptically. "So I was curious. Curious as to why he would risk such a thing. Then I learned of your...*relationship*. And I knew I had to come here."

"Why?"

Will started because it had been *Einar* who had asked. Bedelia, however, showed no indication that his Daemon talking was unusual, and smiled softly again.

"I have known Hannibal Lecter for many years; and for many years I have watched him play with people like a child with toys. He has a thorough and well worn person suit that lets him slip seamlessly between our world and his, and lets him accomplish all that he desires. And he often desires destruction and carnage," she paused. "Did you know that many of Hannibal's patients have committed terribly violent crimes? That he referred patients just at the moment of their breaking to other psychiatrists? His former patient tried to murder me; after I refused to listen to his claims that Hannibal was making his delusions worse. Did you know that many years ago, when I trusted Hannibal's confidence, a young woman asked me questions about him. She was polite and cautious but chasing something that, at the time, I did not fully grasp the scale of..."

"Look -" Will interjected, not really liking where the conversation was going and determined to protect Hannibal.

"Her name was Miriam Lass," Bedelia continued as though he hadn't spoken. "Surely you know Miriam Lass, Special Agent Graham? She disappeared a few days after speaking with

me. At the time I believed she never managed to speak with Hannibal. Later, of course, I had doubts. By the time I realised just what I had stumbled upon, well," she offered a wry smile, "I chose to believe that the two never made each other's acquaintance." A pause. "There are many things I choose to ignore about Hannibal Lecter, Special Agent Graham, and I can assure you it is purely out of self preservation, *but* I feel I had to come here. Hannibal likes pretty things; he likes clever things; but he likes nothing more than *breaking* pretty, clever things. You are certainly clever, Agent Graham, and you're rather pretty too. And, judging by the form of your Daemon, you certainly meet Hannibal's intellectual, physical and psychological inclinations. I came to suggest that you might be careful with a creature like Hannibal Lecter...before any *more* unfortunate incidents befall you."

It took Will a moment, because even reeling from the notion that Hannibal was *The Ripper*, he still had enough in him to see what the woman was alluding to.

"You think Hannibal sent the Devourer after me?" he croaked, disbelief colouring his voice, his heart tightening sharply in his chest.

"Perkūnas was with us," Einar added sharply, tone like ice, rising to his feet. "He wouldn't risk it."

Bedelia offered him another, sad smile. "Does Hannibal seem like someone who cares about what happens to his Daemon?" she asked, hand unconsciously going to her own. "Hannibal Lecter is not like you or I, he's another creature entirely. A man disconnected from his soul doesn't feel the way we do. So why would he not test his new, shiny toy to see if its worth the effort of breaking, and risk his humanity to do so? You interest him, and I'm sure he enjoys that he interests you, but his interest is often short-lived and he does not keep what does not hold his gaze. I would, therefore, suggest caution." Her eyes lingered on Einar for a moment. "If, of course, that's still possible for you," she murmured, standing quickly and smoothing down her incredibly expensive looking suit. "I'd ask you don't mention my presence, Agent Graham, however I'm sure Hannibal would smell me on you. So I will simply ask that you tell him I was concerned after he missed our appointment yesterday and, after reassurance from you, went unknowingly on my way." Another brittle, hollow smile. "I ask that you stress the unknowingly." A pause. "Come on Mara," she urged the fox, moving away and not waiting for a reply. The clack of her heels were like bullets in the quiet.

The fox, Mara, lingered briefly by Einar. She met his gaze and said: "Good luck," before disappearing too.

The sound of an engine, then tires on the gravel and Dr Du Maurier and Mara were gone.

"You don't believe her do you?" Einar asked quietly, voice filled with an uncertainty he clearly didn't like being there.

"Hannibal's the Ripper," Will murmured, feeling the truth of his words deep down in his bones, "you know *that's* true as much as I do." He paused, laughing cynically, dragging a hand through his hair. "So if she was telling the truth about that, how'd ya know she wasn't telling the truth about this?"

"...He wouldn't."

"How'd ya know Einar?" Will asked. "How'd ya know?" He turned away, ignoring the sinking feeling that had settled in his stomach, because suddenly the Ripper profile was merging with everything Will knew about Hannibal and everything was beginning to make sense. The problem wasn't that he was *that* killer, it wasn't even the scale of the mutilation - it was that the Ripper had played with the FBI, with *Will*, before. He'd made him chase his own tail and think himself mad. The Ripper had nearly broken him, until he stepped back mid-case and scrubbed away the parts left over until Einar shed scales and took to the skies once more. Because even though Hannibal was *it* for Will, that he wouldn't turn him in and his feelings hadn't changed, there was a sudden, desperate feeling that maybe he'd misjudged this. Maybe, just maybe, the Ripper was playing him. That all this, all of it, was the work of someone who enjoying winding people up and watching them crack. Or it was self-defence: get onside the one person who could cage him, then have him fall victim to another killer.

God he hoped that wasn't true.

He hoped, pleaded, begged to the skies that it was all lies.

But he couldn't ignore the pit in his stomach.

Because he knew Hannibal was a killer...

...a killer who, *before* hadn't known what it was like to feel Will's soul scream in tandem with his own...

...who had been interested by Will...

...who had drawn him in with vulnerability, slow, lingering kisses and a charm that embraced the darkness in his own mind with a compassion he'd never really been shown.

It couldn't be true, and yet Will found himself thinking that it just might be.

"We're not going to ask," Will finally said. "And we're going to pretend this never happened."

"...Why?"

"Because if this is all a game, Einar," the blue-eyed man replied, voice as unyielding and cold as steel, "we sure as *fuck* aren't going to lose."

Gulliver

Chapter Notes

Hey all, wow sorry about this incredibly long delay, I got massively sidetracked writing like three another fics and then life got busy and then and then and then... Anyway, I will finish this fic as quickly as I can, and apologies for the year-long break.

There be some messed up refs in this bit as our Dragon gets a little bit desperate so heads up, we only want happy peeps here!

anyway, hope everyone's all good and staying positive.

Stay home, stay safe and love to you all.
-R.

Bedelia had changed everything.

Outwardly, he tried to keep to the schedule that he and Hannibal had built up together, but pretending that nothing was wrong was, unsurprisingly, becoming more and more difficult with every passing day. Perkūnas was the first to notice something was amiss. Einar hadn't quite, despite his many forms, managed subtle, and when, after Dr Du Maurier's visit, he lapsed suddenly back into silence, it was a big red flag to the jaguar Daemon that something wasn't right. Especially as no coaxing, grooming or hesitant whimpering could convince the leopard to talk to him again. By the third day, Perkūnas was practically frantic with worry and Will suddenly aware at the stress he was under, dug his hands deep into the jag's fur and soothed him. He even pulled Kūnas into his lap to calm him. The Daemon was less concerned then, but still trailed after Einar closely, seeking comfort as often as he could.

Hannibal, noticing his soul's nervous disposition, had upped his affection, drawing Will into hugs and tending to him dutifully and without a single complaint; even when the profiler groused at him (later blaming pain or irritating stitches or any number of things that could excuse his behaviour). The European took it all on the chin, pressing gentle hands to Will's body and even softer kisses to his cheeks. All in all, he was the perfect gentleman. It was clear he knew he'd been wrong-footed, but said nothing.

He said nothing about Bedelia either - her scent having all but gone, apparently, by the time he returned, arms ladened with food and clothes and pressed the softest of kisses to Will's cheek. Although Will *had* stormed into his workshop and begun gutting fish rather aggressively after the psychiatrist had gone. Hannibal had chided him for over-exerting himself and then ushered him into the shower, nose wrinkling in disgust when the rancid smell had invaded his senses.

Part of Will was angry with the treatment - he knew what Hannibal was now, and he hated how the European hid behind soothing words and softened lines - and Hannibal could sense it. Secretly, he had wanted everything out in the open, fight or no fight, because then he knew where he stood. Whether everything *before* had been nothing more than the Ripper curious about him, or whether Hannibal actually wanted to *be* with him. Had things changed? Or was this a game that, while Will wasn't going to lose, might end up with his heart skewered through. And if he was going to have to watch his chest broken open and his heart pierced through and pecked at by birds, he'd prefer it happen *now* before he fell even further, even deeper, under the European's spell. He wanted to know. He wanted to see the creature that had sent him insane and ask the man beneath if he'd *save* him now.

Five days after Bedelia's visit, they were all climbing the walls, bouncing off one another and clawing at their own person suits in frustration. It was a dangerous, noxious mix of too much and not enough, and Will was actually grateful for Jack's call.

Hannibal was *less* happy. He'd frowned, pulling his brows together so tightly, they were almost stitched into one, making a throw-away comment about how *even now*, Jack wouldn't let Will rest.

"*I'm not happy about this*," Jack had murmured down the phone, clearly pre-empting what Hannibal was going to say. "*But these new killings? We don't understand them. They are the Devourer's, for sure - DNA's a match - but they don't make sense. Nothing is what it should be and, well, we* ***need*** *you Will."*

"He wants you to look," the Doctor whispered once Will had disconnected the call.

"He wants us to look," Will nodded, hand reaching down absentmindedly, finding Perkūnas instead of Einar.

"You're not strong enough for that," Hannibal argued, a barely there shudder rushing through him at the touch.

Annoyance flitted through Will's gaze. "Of course I'm *strong* enough, Han," he replied.

"Will," he replied, tone heavy and weighted with *something* that the profiler just didn't have the energy for.

"I can do this," he insisted.

A snarl, then, barely there, but the boldest expression of just what lay beneath that Will had seen since the hospital car-park. "You shouldn't *have* to," he shot back. "The Devourer *hurt* you, *cut* you, and still Jack - he -" The doctor cut himself off, turning away and drawing a deep, steading breath harshly into his lungs. "I cannot stop you, William," he murmured, "but I dearly wish you wouldn't be so reckless with your recovery." He'd walked away then, leaving Perkūnas leaning heavily against Will's legs.

"We don't want to lose you," the Daemon confessed, voice barely a whisper. "Not now we've found you. Not now we *have* you."

"Perkūnas," Will huffed, guilt spearing through him for the first time in days. "We -" he started, but no words would come.

So he went. He went, ignoring the seething rage that leaked from Hannibal like a bad smell. Will knew it wasn't directed at him - at least not entirely - but it still made he and Einar shift from foot to foot, cautious of the predator in their space whom they had learnt did not harbour the best of intentions... at least he hadn't *before*.

Jack wasn't lying when he said he needed him.

It was a cool morning - cool enough that Hannibal had bundled him up in at least two more layers than he *needed* and had supplied him with a large flask of warm tea - when the pair returned to a crime scene. The place itself was relatively nondescript - a dozen kilometres from the nearest Walmart and five or so from the next property. It was simple and rustic, the kind of hideaway that people might escape to when running from the city, leaving their phones and talking of returning to nature. There was a long, wrap-around-porch with a bench filled with cushions and blankets and even through the windows, Will could see warm, comfy colours dominating the space. The woman who had owned the two-up-two-down had been called Wendy Perdu. An old school teacher with a dead husband, two daughters down in Carolina and a son up in Alaska, she lived alone, but spent four days a week with old friends and neighbours. Her Daemon had taken the form of a mole, although they'd only known that from records, it having long turned to dust by the time Wendy was discovered by her former colleague and regular bingo partner Carol.

"She's the forth since you were attacked," Jack said in lieu of a greeting, Aurick just dipping his head. "They were all pretty much, well, like this," he continued, flinging out an arm towards the *mess* before them.

"Fuck," Will muttered, Einar, who had returned temporarily to his wolf form, raised his hackles instantly. Even Hannibal seemed unnerved by the display if the furrow of his brow and the way Perkūnas' lips peeled back was any indication. A twinge in his core had Will's hand dropping instantly - a move tracked by Hannibal who was instantly beside him, fussing. "I'm fine," he hissed, a little too strongly if Jack's raised eyebrows were any indication. The profiler softened. "Han, I'm fine," he echoed with a nod, moving forward towards the display.

"Blood loss got her," Beverley chimed in from the side, uncomfortable and clutching Mallory close. "Or shock," she added. "Either way, she was alive for, uh, most of it."

Wendy had been flayed. Will could see every tendon and muscle, the sinew that wrapped itself like ivy around the limbs, the veins and arteries - some intact and *red*, others hacked free of their moorings and sticking at odd angles from the body. The *slick* of the body was visible, even from his place five meters away, and the blood that drenched the grass told him that Wendy had been butchered outside. It had created the kind of space where they very air itself had screams smeared down it like handprints on cream walls. Her limbs had been bent out of shape: twisted and contorted and *stretched* to build a vision that lived and breathed inside the Devourer's head. Mere clay beneath the hands of the dragon, she had been transformed, forced into a new shape, a new life, a new *being* that bathed in the radiance of his becoming.

"This is his evolution," Will breathed out between his teeth, something itching at the base of his mind. "He's showing us something."

"Something?" Hannibal murmured, words puffs of air against his neck. Will shivered.

"This is what lives behind his eyes."

"The other victims were all women too," Jack added, a file in his hand. "All more or less left like this, but we found semen on two of the victims."

"On?"

Jack winced. "On and in," he muttered, disgust evident on his features. "Sexual assault on them all," he elaborated.

"He's debasing them," a voice said from behind as another person swaggered into view, handkerchief pressed to his face, covering enough of his nose and mouth so not to be invaded by the harsh metallic taste of *blood-death-despair*. "He makes them less before he mutilates them." He turned to the pair then, a brilliant and completely inappropriate smile breaking across his face. He moved the fabric away and offered his free hand. "Doctor Lecter," he grinned. Hannibal accepted the hand and shook it once before releasing it. "And you must be *Will*," the man continued, eyes a little too intense for Will to feel entirely comfortable, particularly given the *wrongness* of his assessment.

This wasn't about being defiled, as repugnant as the killer's actions were, he'd not assaulted the women to make them *less*.

"Will, this is Dr. Frederick Chilton," Jack offered. "Dr. Chilton was called in to assist after you and Dr Lecter were... away," he trailed off.

"Pleasure," Chilton smiled, eyes not wavering from Will. "This is Gulliver," he added, gesturing to the Daemon perched on his shoulder. A weasel or a stoat, if Will's guess was right.

"Charmed," Gulliver added.

Chilton's name rang a bell - a faint one in the back of his mind, until it was dragged forth. Ah, *Baltimore*. This was Chilton.

Will didn't like him.

He didn't like the smug, slightly bloated face. He didn't like the eager raking gaze that slipped down Will's face, his chest, lingered at his groin before finally resting squarely on Einar. He didn't like the half smile, the one that seemed to scream of ill-intent and studies and *getting-what-he-wanted*. He didn't like Chilton's blatant attempt to slither closer. Will might have been confused and furious and unmoored over Hannibal but that didn't mean he wanted anyone else. It didn't mean he wanted an interloper to slip in through the cracks and settle because he thought he had the right to.

In short, Chilton gave him the creeps.

And it seemed Hannibal agreed. His back was straight, painfully so, and his muscles coiled just enough for Will to see the silent scream of *stay back* that radiated from them. The European clearly didn't like the intent in Chilton's gaze at it mapped Will, nor the curious look at Einar, as though waiting for the Daemon to shift. Perkūnas had calmly situated himself between Gulliver and Einar, not as though anticipating an attack, but a bold and quick reminder that the unsettled Daemon had already been claimed. The narrowing of Gulliver's beady eyes told all of them that the move had been seen and, if the sudden determination that flickered across his human's features, accepted as the challenge it was never meant to be.

"His psychology hasn't changed," Will finally said instead, taking a half step back until he was ever-so-slightly closer to Hannibal. He didn't have the time nor the inclination to address the desperate interest in the Doctor's eyes, nor the hungry undercurrent that backlit his gaze. "But the sexual assault is new," Will glanced at the European and let his fingers drift down towards Kūnas. "He's looking for new ways to... *be-one-with-them*. Killing, opening them up, wasn't working, consuming them wasn't working, now he's trying this."

"A dangerous escalation," Hannibal agreed, fingers tangling briefly in Einar's fur before the wolf shifted away. It looked casual but from the sudden tense in Hannibal's shoulders, he knew it wasn't. "The shape?" he prompted, tone tight but determined to keep Will's focus on him and the case.

"When he attacked me, he called himself the Dragon," he said. "Maybe this is what his Daemon looks like to him... or what *he* looks like."

"This bloodied shapeless thing?" Chilton asked incredulously, Gulliver huffing in disbelief alongside him.

Will turned an unimpressed glare the Doctor's way. "To him we're all just slugs in the sun, waiting to join him, to be awed by him" he paused. "To be with him." There was a long pause before the profiler turned to look back at what remained of Ms Wendy Perdue. "To *him*, Dr Chilton, this? - this is **glorious**."

Jack shot him a look and Aurick shifted forward, tilting his head as though waiting for something. "I'm probably going to regret asking this as I don't think I want to know what he's doing with the skin, but -," Jack began, "Do you have any ideas Will?"

The profiler winced and glanced at Hannibal. The Doctor frowned. "If he is escalating but still following the same desire to merge, to become, with his victims, I would not be surprised to discover he has kept them."

Jack's face paled. "For what?"

"What do hunter's do, Agent Crawford, when they skin an animal? They wear its pelt of course," Dr Chilton chimed in.

A huff had the blue-eyed man glancing down. Einar was looking at him intently before he shifted in a flurry of fur and feathers, coming to perch on his human's shoulder. "It wouldn't be for him." Will breathed. "He said his Daemon was becoming, he wanted to make him

shift. Maybe he thinks that if his Daemon takes the spoils, I -" he paused. "Snakes, they shed their skin, they moult, maybe his version of Dragons do too. Maybe this is a moult. His victims are becoming and his Daemon can to if he -"

"Wraps him in the skin of the dead?" Hannibal finished.

"I don't know, but the skin, it's for his Daemon. It's for Morfran."

"Morfran?" Chilton inquired, wetting his lips. "What a peculiar name." There was a pause, almost as though the man was building up tension for dramatic affect. "Morfran is a name I believe I have heard before, Special Agent."

"You have?" Aurick asked, as demanding as his human, completely missing the attempt at a flirt that Chilton was sending Will's way.

"In a fan letter to one of my patients." He blushed a little then. "I don't make a habit of reading my patient's mail of course, Agent Crawford, however Abel Gideon's claims to be the Chesapeake Ripper are loud enough to warrant some, ah, *extra* attention."

Something cold settled in Will's stomach. "A Ripper fan?" he asked, voice deceptively level for the turmoil within.

"We can show you the letters, should you desire it Agent Graham," Gulliver offered.

"We'll need to see everything," Jack cut in before Will could reply.

"Although not now," Hannibal interjected. Eyes all swung to him. "William is still recovering from his stay in hospital and while he is the most resilient individual I know, I am loathe to let him dive straight back into this work with the vigour he possessed prior to his injury. At least until he is fully healed."

Guilt was bleeding through Jack's eyes when he spoke again, once more before Will could reply. "Tomorrow then," he said, gaze meeting Will's, "if you're up for it."

"I will be," the younger man nodded, Einar shifting his wings in agreement, determination bleeding out through his eyes.

"Ah, *wonderful*," Chilton enthused, grin too wide and too bright to be anything other than anticipatory. "Just **wonderful**."

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